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SOCIAL ROOTS OF THE ARTS

Social Roots of the Arts

BY LOUIS HARAP



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*TO THE MEMORY OF
CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL*

Preface

This book is offered at a decisive moment for culture. Under the impact of a social system in rapid decline, American artists are reacting variously—some in abject surrender to the lure of cash, others in evasion of the challenge of a new world struggling to be born. These artists are allowing themselves passively to reflect the insoluble contradictions in which capitalism is involved. Yet all over the world cultural workers are allying themselves with the truly creative forces, the working class protagonists in the gigantic conflict between those who would hold back human advance and those who would carry humanity forward. In this heroic struggle the artist has an important part to play. He can help the people to attain consciousness of realities of a changing world. If the artist is to fulfill this function, he must himself have that “consciousness of necessity” which is the essence of freedom.

If this book stimulates the artist and those who are devoted to culture to deepen their awareness of the social roots and goals of culture, it will be justified. This volume is not a definitive study of esthetic problems. At best this book signifies that we are on the threshold of a new understanding of art and culture, thanks to the fruitful Marxist method and philosophy. This book attempts to present certain known principles of Marxist esthetics and to suggest problems for further examination through collective effort of many scholars and thinkers. Engels was well aware of the magnitude of the tasks awaiting the Marxists. “The development of the materialistic conception in regard to a single historical example,” he wrote, “was a scientific work which would demand years of tranquil study, for it is obvious that nothing can be done here with mere phrases, that only a mass of critically

viewed, completely mastered historical material can enable one to solve such a task." (Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*.)

It remains for the writer to acknowledge the generous help received from many students and friends, too numerous to mention, who read and criticized the manuscript at various stages of its preparation. Without their helpful criticism this book would never have been completed. In particular, this writer wishes to thank Avrom Landy for valuable editorial help. However, final responsibility for the book rests with the writer.

L. H.

1. *Production as Foundation*

THE SOURCES of art are not to be discovered vaguely "in society" or in a number of material "factors." Specifically, art is determined by those related forces which, operating together, account for all social activities—government, science, law, religion, morality, and art. The bewildering diversity of human activities gives to each an appearance of independence, but in reality they all depend upon the same basic forces, the mode of production. Like any mental or material human activity, art is founded in production. Marx himself supplied the most succinct statement of the relationship of all forms of consciousness to production:

"In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the social, political and intellectual life processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social

revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, esthetic or philosophic, in short, ideological, forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore, mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, we will always find that the task itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.”¹

Production is related to art as the soil is to the plant. Art can no more express feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and forms which do not grow out of the mode of production than a plant can grow without earth and water. Thus only by tracing its links with production can the history of art be adequately grasped. This statement, however, is in reality extremely complex and should by no means be oversimplified. It is certainly not intended as a strict “economic” interpretation of art, as will become clear. Engels decisively cautioned against such vulgar interpretations of historical materialism.

“Accordingly to the materialistic conception of history the determining element in history is *ultimately* the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the *only* determining

one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc.—forms of law—and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants: political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless *host* of accidents (*i.e.*, of things and events whose inner connection is so remote or so impossible to prove that we regard it as absent and can neglect it) the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary.”²

Nowhere does the dependence of art on production appear more clearly than in primitive art. Man’s all-absorbing pre-occupation at this stage of society was production for bare survival. Relationships of man to man and man to nature were simple, naked, direct. Division of labor was at a low level—labor functions were mainly divided by sex. The means of production were simple tools, and so man’s own labor played a basic role in that society. Labor had not yet assumed a disguised form in machines that embodied and concealed it, as in more developed societies. The significance of this primitive form of labor for the origins of art can hardly be exaggerated. At the end of the last century, Karl Buecher, a German economist, formulated the theory that rhythm, song, and poetry emerged from primitive labor.³ He explained that bodily movements in labor were most efficient and least fatiguing if performed rhythmically. Work movements such as wielding an axe or flail naturally fall into rhythmical patterns. Furthermore, men doing manual labor in groups had to adjust their motions rhythmically to organize them efficiently. At the height of muscular tension in rhythmic work grunts or tones are emitted. Primitive man added words to these tones; then he filled in the spaces between tones with other words, and poetry and song resulted. Buecher also sug-

gested that the sound of tools as they struck resounding materials were imitated by the voice. Some of these tools were also developed into musical instruments. Buecher collected a number of such primitive work songs to strengthen his case that the formal and material elements of song and poetry originated in work rhythms. Even those scholars who do not fully agree with Buecher's theory affirm that he had hit upon a fundamental determinant of song and poetry.* Thus one profound influence of production on art is through the medium of the rhythm, a basic element of art, in primitive work.

Another basic relationship between primitive production and art was observed by Franz Boas, who noted that literature—songs and tales—were universal among primitive peoples. Literature requires a period of quiet for composition and all societies fulfill this condition in one way or another. Work in agricultural societies in which food is acquired and stored in one season leaves time for leisure and composition in off-seasons. In hunting or fishing tribes, such leisure periods occur while the hunter is waiting for his prey or while the fisherman is waiting for fish to bite, as in the case of the Eskimo, who waits for hours for seals to appear at breathing holes. Primitive production also enters into the creation of literature by its reflection in the content of songs and tales.

Mimetic magic among primitive men played an enormous role in their psychological adaptation to the needs of production. With the aid of magic they were put in a frame of mind the better to hunt, fish, cultivate the land, or wage war. Magic pervades primitive arts. Early man thought that he could gain overwhelming power over animals, other men, or natural processes by mimicking them. To a great extent his art consisted of symbolic representations of animals, men or natural phenomena, or in imitating them realistically in his own person

*For example, Ernst Grosse, in his review of Buecher's book, wrote: "We cannot grant that Buecher has proved that the formal and material origin of poetry is to be found in work; but we must recognize that work has had quite a significant influence on the material as well as formal development of poetry and that he was the first clearly to recognize and adequately elaborate this."⁴

or in drawings. Most of his dancing, his primary art, was mimetic.* The content of mimetic dance among hunting or agricultural peoples varies with productive needs. The hunting tribe cast a spell over the animals to be hunted by imitating the hunt and killing them symbolically in a dance. Agricultural peoples have their harvest dances in which the success of the harvest is depicted. The most important events of primitive life were celebrated in dance either to ensure success beforehand or to confirm success after it had been achieved. But all dances derive their meaning from the struggle of primitive man to survive and are based on his mode of production.

Among agricultural peoples enough rain is the central social need. Ceremonies around the rain charm are therefore most important. In northwestern Australia, for instance, the rain-making ceremony consists in placing a magic stone on a pile of stones. The rain-maker dances around this pile for hours until he falls exhausted. Or among the extinct Tahitians the dancers threw themselves upon the ground, rolled around and around and struck the ground with their hands and feet. These motions represented lightning and thunder, and the stamping of the feet was the act of taking possession of the ground. Among some peoples the leap dance was practiced, and the higher the leap, the higher the corn would grow. In dances of hunting people the dancers become momentarily the animals or objects which they mimic. The gait, the howling or roaring of edible animals are mimicked. In this way fish, bears, birds, buffaloes, turtles, and other animals are enticed toward the hunter.⁶

The sculpture and painting of primitive peoples, too, are dominated by magic. A major form of sculpture is the totem. Totemism is the widespread practice of identifying a family, village, or tribe with an animal or earthly spirit which gives the human group power over the environment. The totem is

*A significant observation on the vital relation of production to art was made by Ernst Grosse in the case of the dance: "The modern dance presents itself to us in every respect as a vestigial organ which has become useless in consequence of changed conditions of life, and has therefore degenerated."⁵ Although Grosse perhaps exaggerates the "uselessness" of the dance in modern life, there can be no question that it is far less vital to the life of contemporary than to primitive man.

a symbolic image of the sacred animal or spirit in sculptural form of wood or stone. If the proper ritual is observed, the totem will protect the family or tribe in its struggle for survival. In many parts of the world totemic masks are worn during the hunt or in ceremonial dances. While the mask is worn, the dancer possesses the power of the totem and controls the outcome of the prospective hunt or harvest. Totemic symbolism dominates the art of the North American hunting or fishing tribes. These tribes use symbolic figures of the hawk, eagle, bear, whale, and fish of all kinds to help them obtain their means of existence.

Primitive painting is generally acknowledged to have magical significance. Paleolithic drawings depict bison, deer, the wild horse, the wild boar, and other hunted animals. The same is true of the painting of Bushmen and Australian hunting tribes. These paintings represent the hunted animals; some depict masked dancers as well. Arrows are painted in some pictures, and other paintings appear to have been shot at. These paintings are sometimes found in ceremonial sites. All these features point to the magic purpose of the art.

It is of the highest significance that hunting peoples generally depict only animals and men in their paintings and neglect plants. This phenomenon has been observed in various parts of the world, which leads to the conclusion that similar modes of production account for similarities in primitive art. It appears that usually hunting tribes are exceptionally proficient in naturalistic representation. Grosse points out that Bushmen, Australian tribes, and Eskimos, all hunting groups whose existence depends on sharpness of observation and manual skill in carving weapons, excel in representational art, which can be attributed to their mode of production. Conversely these talents are rare among lower farming and herding groups.⁷ The North American Indians, a hunting group, are an exception. Their art is largely symbolic rather than naturalistic. But even here the subject of their art is restricted to men and animals and does not include plants.

Among hunting groups there is generally a single major division of labor between men and women. Men do the hunt-

ing and women work at home, including food-gathering. A corresponding division exists in their art. The typical hunting arts are the province of the men, while the women engage in ornamental and decorative arts. This sharp division occurs among North American Indians. The woman pursues a geometrical decorative art in weaving, basketry, and embroidery. This woman's art is the link with the typical art of agricultural societies. One of the best studied of these is the Bushango of Africa, who practice highly developed arts of weaving and embroidery, as well as wood and metal carving. Their fine formal decorative motifs probably derive from leaves and other conventionalized plant forms. As among agricultural peoples, the human form is rarely found in their art, except for a succession of finely carved naturalistic figures, probably of their rulers. Some animal figures do appear in their art, but characteristically they are not hunted animals, but the antelope, lizard, scarab, weevil, and insects.

The beginnings of art thus show that art results from the intricate interplay of forces both within and outside of it, and that the source of all this complex activity is in production. We have seen how relatively simple and direct is the connection between the mode of production and the creation of art in primitive societies. But this relationship becomes more intricate as society itself becomes more highly differentiated. As society develops, it absorbs and integrates elements from the past, so that more and more possibilities of human expression are continually realized. Despite the growing inner complication of production, the interaction of the two main aspects of production, the forces of production and production relations, remain the prime movers of history. The forces of production are the experienced, skillful people who produce material values and the instruments and materials they use. The production relations are the sum of those relationships between the human beings involved in production—after the rise of private property, the owners of the means of production and the workers whose labor they exploit. The inevitable antagonisms between these two groups of people, the exploiters and the exploited, are

manifested in the class struggle. Since all the productive forces and relations in a given society are continually interacting, the various aspects of production which influence creation are hard to separate from one another. It is therefore necessary to abstract elements of this complex for study in order to see how the productive influences fit together.

Although "religion, family, the state, law, ethics, science, art, etc., are only *specific* forms of production and fall under its general laws,"⁸ there are important distinctions between this type and the production of material goods. The latter are man-made objects directly used in the course of living, and include such articles as utensils, household goods, furniture, clothing, food, and the range of useful things that society is able to produce at any given stage of its development. No question of what these objects "mean" arises, for they are primarily functional; only the question of how they are used can arise. But art is qualitatively different, for it is a "representation," symbolical or naturalistic, of something, and it is made to "mean" something. In other words, apart from its physical existence, art is a form of ideology. It is to one degree or another an interpretation of life and the world and thus has an indirect relation to reality. Ideology may or may not be true, may or may not represent reality, while a material product simply is, and may or may not be useful. Ideologies do not arise spontaneously but are a reflection of the material and social conditions which determine their existence. They are "reflexes and echoes of this life-process," as Marx put it. Another way of contrasting these two types of production is to say that one is material or physical and the other mental or "spiritual."

In primitive society, as we saw, mental and material production are difficult, if not impossible, to separate because of the low degree of the division of labor. Not only were mental and material products inextricably joined in the same objects, but they were made by the same person. Only as society developed did mental production become severed from material production in the separation of material producers from thinkers and artists. But these functions have never become separated so absolutely that useful objects may not also be regarded as art

objects. Thus both types of production are sometimes embodied in the same objects in the case of utilitarian things. Mental production is most clearly realized in the intellectual activities of man and in the so-called fine arts.

But the esthetic object is, among other things, an economic object which, as Marx said of the commodity, is "an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference."⁹ In other words, the esthetic object possesses use-value, and is subject to the laws of exchange of the society in which it is used. An esthetic object satisfies a variety of wants, the desire for beauty, knowledge, adornment, amusement, the need to fortify one's convictions or to be at one with other men, the enforcement of a class position or enhancement of personal prestige. People are ready to pay for the satisfaction of these wants. The work of art also represents the application of the artist's skill to some natural material or sensuous medium; it is the embodiment of his imagination, his form of labor. Unless the artist or craftsman has independent means, he must be kept alive—too often, barely kept alive—by his art, if the satisfaction of this want is to be continued.

On this fundamental level art has a specifically economic aspect. This fact is big with consequences for the form and content of art. Heretofore philosophers have tended to ignore this phase of creation as isolated from and irrelevant to the meaning of art, for they have too little understood how the economic permeates all aspects of the creative process. In the past sociologists have viewed art as the expression of the artist's milieu or of vague "racial" or social forces. Only the historical materialists have grasped the crucial significance of the artist's participation in production and of the status of his product as a commodity. Artists themselves have been well aware that their product was a commodity, for they have had to live by it. In seventeenth century Holland, for instance, paintings were often exchanged for goods at the fair stalls. But philosophers have for the most part discoursed airily about art as though such facts had no bearing on esthetics. They did not see that

the necessity of satisfying the purchaser of art tended to modify what the artist said and how he said it. The influence of such economic pressures will be analyzed in a later chapter.

One of the profound consequences of the interlocking of art with production was the effect of the division of labor on man's esthetic development. The growth of specialization, an essential element of art history, emerged from the increase of complexity of production. In primitive society the craftsman who produced the esthetic objects we so greatly admire was not exclusively a craftsman: his craft was but one part of his productive activity. The hunter not only hunted, but made his own weapons; the woman, who gathered food and took care of the household, also made the tools with which she worked. Not until the group had accumulated enough surplus to free them from hand-to-mouth existence could the craftsman devote himself exclusively to his craft. This became possible in early agricultural communities. According to Marx, there is one ancient agricultural community in India in which such craftsmen as the potter, silversmith, and perhaps even the poet, among other specialists, were supported by the community.¹⁰ Accumulation of surplus was the condition for the proliferation of men's demands and the higher division of labor and specialization necessary to satisfy them. The congregation of men in cities, made possible by commerce, stimulated art production, and the fine arts became specialized activities to satisfy the needs and pleasures of the leisure class. The growth of commerce, too, was accompanied by specialization in the making of commodities for export, such as woven goods.

With the accumulation of wealth in ancient societies, in the modern Hanseatic and Italian city-states, and in all advanced communities, considerable labor was allocated to the production of luxuries, which comprise much of the greatest art of humanity. Great technical strides were called forth in the arts by their subsidized creators. Renaissance art—its great paintings, sculptures, metal work, architecture—was possible in part because of the commercial prosperity of the city-states, and this commercial society utilized skills never before realized in

history, as a consequence of the division of labor. "Raphael," said Marx and Engels, "like every other artist, was conditioned by the technical progress which the art had made before him, by the organization of society and the division of labor in his locality, and finally by the division of labor in all countries with which his own locality had relations. Whether an individual like Raphael develops his talent depends entirely upon the demand which in turn depends upon the division of labor and the cultural relations of people arising from this."¹¹ The division of labor, in its turn, was a result of the system of production, the foundation of the entire social structure.

Art may be said to have begun when primitive man made his first flint, and from that time to this the quality and character of man-made beauty have been influenced by the function of craftsmanship in society. Thus the efflorescence of talent that came with specialization also brought with it the suppression of talent among the masses, whose activity was restricted to their own trade. "The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in a few individuals," said Marx and Engels, "and its consequent suppression in the large masses is the result of the division of labor."¹² This tendency to cut off the masses from creative activity has gained momentum in the capitalistic world since the nineteenth century; it is being checked and reversed in the Soviet Union.

Despite the fact that production is a condition for art, the level of art does not always necessarily coincide with the degree of development of production in the strictly economic sphere. For the historical fact is that very fine masterpieces were created in societies of low economic level and are comparable to the art of the highest phase of capitalist development. "It is well known," says Marx, "that certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connection with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization. Witness the example of the Greeks as compared with the modern nations or even Shakespeare."¹³ From this one cannot conclude that art is not a reflection of production. The real relation can

be seen from an examination of the principle of the unequal development of art and production.

A direct relationship does exist between science and production. For there is ample evidence to show that scientific development was called forth by economic needs. Problems set by production stimulated scientific thought for their solution. Technology, or the application of scientific principles to production, is one of the essential indices of the state of production. It is generally known that astronomy was early advanced by commercial societies such as the Phoenicians and by Europe of the age of discovery. As Engels said, "If society has a technical need, that helps science forward more than ten universities."¹⁴ He notes that the science of hydrostatics was developed by Torricelli and others in seventeenth-century Italy because of the necessity of regulating mountain streams. Innumerable examples could be cited to show that economic necessity was the mother of science. The unprecedented enrichment of science in the past three centuries is directly dependent upon the multiplied technical needs of industrial civilization.

One function of science is to change the outer world in order to change men. Production has the same effect as science in this respect, for it changes nature for human purposes. But the relationship of art to production is more subtle. For art, as Christopher Caudwell remarked, changes the world, by changing man's consciousness. Whereas science largely exerts its influence directly on production, the influence of art is indirect. Science discovers uniformities of nature, while art organizes human feelings in various mediums of sight and sound. The content of art does not therefore refer primarily to non-human reality but to social relationships and the feelings they invoke. These relationships and feelings are determined by production. The mode of production, said Marx and Engels, "is a definite form of activity of these individuals [comprising a society], a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material condi-

tions determining their production.”¹⁵ This “mode of life” is an organic whole, including overt activity as well as ideological activity. Art is one mode of ideology which objectifies the current state of consciousness and, by making it explicit, modifies it.

Although art results from the mode of production, it does not necessarily progress in excellence as the latter develops. For the evidence decisively shows that low levels of production have received expression in splendid art and high levels of production have brought forth inferior art. We have seen that primitive art was determined by the activities and techniques by which the group gained its subsistence. Despite the low level of production in primitive society, its art does not suffer from comparison with the art of societies at higher levels of production. Clearly, then, the unequal development of art and production is a basic principle. The sculptured head of the Egyptian queen Nofretete is certainly comparable in excellence to anything in modern sculpture. The prevailing taste of nineteenth-century England and America, which experienced the most rapid economic development known until that time, was low. Innumerable examples could be cited to illustrate that discrepancies exist between art and the level of production.

The reasons for this discrepancy are complex, but they can be traced to the mode of production. Fundamentally all the arts, except those like the new art of the film, which had its origin in the mass-production techniques of industrial and finance capitalism, can achieve full technical maturity under the systems of manual production that preceded capitalism. In an art like sculpture the tools involved have not changed radically from primitive times to our own day. Although science and technology have influenced painting and drawing (for instance, perspective during the Renaissance, researches in color, light and vision during the nineteenth century) their techniques have not changed essentially since the first cave drawings of paleolithic man. And literature did not require machine technology for its great achievements since the Greeks. The highest craftsmanship in the arts was therefore possible before industrialism. On the other hand, obsolescence of the crafts

during the rapid development of machine production since the end of the eighteenth century was in large measure responsible for the decline in taste during that period. Only since industrial design was introduced into mass production in our own century has taste in objects of utility improved. Thus we can see that one reason for the possibility of great art under a low level of production and the inferiority of much art under a high level can be traced to the techniques of production.

But the quality of art is also a manifestation of the patterns of thinking and feeling of a period, and these depend on social conditions to which the mode of production gives rise. The health of this art or its excellence does not necessarily vary directly with the level of achievement of production, but depends rather on the integration of the artist with his society. Where this integration was close, as in fifth-century Greece or Elizabethan England, a great and healthy art was produced. These periods when art flourished were also conditioned by a burst of commercial dominance and the first flush of triumph of the commercial bourgeoisie. Under capitalism, however, disintegration set in early. The bourgeois artist of the nineteenth century was alienated by philistine capitalist society which, as Marx said, was "hostile to art and poetry." This disintegration had two results: on the one hand, it generated an era of bad taste, and, on the other hand, the great art of the period, in violent reaction against this prevailing bad taste, was unhealthy because of the separation of the artist from society. Thus, while the history of production shows a progressive rise in level, efficiency, and productivity, the history of art does not exhibit a correlative progressive rise in the level of achievement. Art rather reflects the complex forces at work in the mode of production that determine consciousness.

In his study of Marx's utterances on art, the Soviet critic Mikhail Lifshitz attempts to explain why Marx believed Greek art to be superior to the art of capitalism. He quotes Marx as follows: "In most striking contrast with this accentuation of quantity and exchange-value [in capitalist society] is the attitude of the writers of classical antiquity, who hold exclusively by quality and use value. In consequence of the

separation of the social branches of production, commodities are better made, the various bents and talents of men select a suitable field, and without some restraint no important results can be obtained anywhere. Hence both product and producer are improved by division of labour."¹⁶ Lifshitz then comments: "Under the ancient form of the division of labor, the qualitative and quantitative were relatively commensurable: human activities and abilities were not yet subordinated to the abstract-quantitative principle of accumulating capital."¹⁷ This helps us to understand the high quality of Greek art, says Lifshitz. Moreover, the author indicates that in ancient society the individual was identified with the collective sense of the society, whereas in bourgeois society he has been alienated. Hence the superiority of Greek art as a whole can be ascribed to the fact that it did not suffer from the contradictions and the tensions of alienation from society imposed on the modern artist.

Undoubtedly this explanation helps us to understand the greatness of Greek art. But the explanation is too general; Lifshitz' analysis tells us generally why pre-capitalist art *can* be superior to art under capitalism but it does not explain fifth-century Greek art in particular, for the same could be said of many pre-capitalist societies. The influence of production on Greek art is manifold and complex, however, and its full significance requires more specific analysis of Greek society and its artistic tradition. The full explanation of the greatness of fifth-century Greek art lies in the specific technical artistic basis within the framework of the commercial-agricultural economy, its limited democracy, and the flexible social relations that resulted.

The brief, brilliant period of Gothic architecture in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries offers an illuminating instance of the relations between the mode of production and art. After the ninth century, French central royal power was weak, the feudal lords were in the ascendant, and society was almost exclusively rural. Recovery came in the eleventh century; and the Crusades, which had begun in 1096, were both a sign and a stimulant of

the quickening economic life. For two centuries, the twelfth and thirteenth, the vigorous French royal house of Capet dominated Europe. And it was in northern France, the kingdom of the Capet kings during this period, that the Gothic cathedral originated and flowered.

The overshadowing influence of Christianity on feudal life was expressed in the Gothic cathedral. Yet the actual form and content of that architecture was determined by the economic structure, as well as by Christianity, whose medieval form was an expression of the consciousness generated by that underlying structure. By the twelfth century people had come together into the medieval towns as a result of the reawakened commerce and the flourishing handicraft system under guild organization. The guilds of merchants had gained a monopoly of trade in the towns. The craft guilds appeared in the towns of northern France early in the twelfth century. At the same time the central power had revived and helped the towns in their struggles against the landed feudal nobility. Money returned into circulation. The towns became markets where exchange of town and agricultural products took place.

The Gothic cathedral came into being as the artistic expression of these new Christian aggregates of population. The overwhelming bulk and dominating height of the cathedral signified the power of religion in feudal life. Many specific traits of the cathedral style expressed the contemporary phase of its economy, a highly integrated community of craftsmen and merchants. For the Gothic cathedral was not only a form of architecture—it was the consummation of the whole artistic life of the people. As essential a part of the cathedral as its bare structure were the decorative arts of sculpture, carving, metal work, stained glass and other crafts. The wealth of the commercial society and the labor of the town freemen made the cathedral possible, made it indeed a translation into material form of their whole life, religious, social, and economic. Further, the time, place, and conditions of the appearance of the Gothic cathedral are a direct consequence of the productive forces and relations existing at that time and place. No doubt the complete analysis of the nature and significance of the Gothic cathedral involves

greater complexity in terms of tradition, architectural detail, religious symbolism and its relation to contemporary life. But the main outline of this art form, which comprehended the life of two European centuries, is clearly a reflection of the mode of production. Its rapid rise in the twelfth and rapid decline in the fourteenth century accompany the rise and decline of the town phase of feudalism. The classical style that followed the Gothic in Italy was a token of the nascent capitalism there and was one expression of the antagonism of the opening stage of capitalism toward the feudal order.

The history of the arts in the United States is not intelligible unless viewed in relation to the development of production. Why were the arts in this country until World War I on the whole inferior to those of Europe? The basic reason, as one writer put it, is because "the energies of the nation have gone into the development of the country." This is a summary way of stating a number of causes, all resulting from the mode of production: motives for colonization; distance from the home country and the cultural source of the new land; the virgin character of the country, the state of transportation and communication, the sparseness of the population. A cultured man in a frontier situation does not produce good art because his training and consciousness lead him to conceive of art as a specialized function. Since there was at first neither surplus nor leisure to spare for this luxury—nor could men be spared to practice it—the artistic life of the colonial American community tended at first to degenerate. Folk art and crafts, however, flourished, because they served utilitarian purposes and were necessary for life. But Americans were hardly in a position even to think of sophisticated artistic creation in any extended way until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the economic life of the country had accumulated enough surplus through chattel slavery, commerce, and shipbuilding to allow for leisure and the allocation of labor and resources for the broadening of life. At this time we see a significant development of architecture (Georgian), the household arts and attempts at painting, mainly of portraits. However, the dominantly

agricultural nature of the economy was not conducive to the growth of great art.* Nor was the fact that the European source of the artistic tradition was far away and inaccessible favorable for the flowering of art.

These facts accounting for the state of the arts are part of an organized pattern of events, namely, the development of production in the United States. Thus we find a new pattern of culture decisively taking form after the election of Andrew Jackson to the presidency in 1828, reflecting the rapid advance in American economic life with a spurt in westward expansion and accelerated commercial growth. The bourgeoisie was taking power in earnest, accompanied by an era of bad taste (paralleled in Europe). With them they brought a ruthless and greedy exploitation of both the multiplying machine techniques and of labor, and consequently they were altogether oblivious to the need for adjusting machine production to esthetic considerations. Although Europe became more accessible and there was much travel, the creative energies of the country were channeled into invention and improvement of machine processes. Westward expansion also had its unsettling and uprooting effects. Handicrafts degenerated under economic competition from the machine, and machine products were unrelieved in their ugliness. The dreariness of cities and countryside drawn into industrialization had a catastrophic effect on sensibility.

This era did however produce a distinguished literary art among those who remained in the East, and mainly in the Northeast, writers like Washington Irving, Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. This achievement occurred in literature rather than in the graphic arts largely because the literary heritage conveyed through books was available to America while the great paintings were inaccessible until later. It finally bore fruit during this post-Jacksonian period of westward expansion. Another reason why literature flourished was the magnitude of the literary

*By 1800 there were only six cities in the United States with a population over 8,000, and this urban population was only four per cent of the total. Even by 1830 the population in the cities was only 6.7 per cent of the total.¹⁸

audience in contrast to the far smaller audience for painting. The tradition of the graphic arts, which requires for its assimilation a constant and every-day absorption of original works over a period, was not yet available to Americans. It was not until the rise of great fortunes after the Civil War that quantities of original art works were purchased and brought over from Europe, and it was only at this time, because of the increasing prosperity and ease of travel, that American art students could go in large numbers to the source of inspiration in Europe. Only then could America begin to show a significant development in painting.

After the Civil War industrial capitalism leaped forward with unprecedented speed. For several decades after the Civil War writers in the New West, the middle West, the South, and New England, nourished on the accumulated American literary tradition, were writing about local life; regional literature flourished with Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and a host of minor writers. But the people's side of the new democracy produced by industrialism found its national expression in Walt Whitman. He sensitively registered the new cultural values and the multiplicity of America. Mystically he expressed that faith in the masses which was to have more conscious and reasoned exponents in later writers identified with the working class. It was not until the eighties, and after, however, that the onrushing industrialism made its way into literature with the school of realistic novelists like William Dean Howells, Frank Norris, Upton Sinclair, and Theodore Dreiser. Industrialism also had its effect on architecture. Toward the end of the century extremely rapid urbanization, particularly in Chicago, brought about the creation of America's contribution to world architecture, the skyscraper. This was made possible on the technical side by the development of structural steel and reinforced concrete, and on the creative side by the fresh genius of Louis Sullivan, who conceived the new possibilities of these structural materials under the guiding principle that "form follows function."

America's entry into the world contest of imperialism at the time of the Spanish-American War profoundly altered our mode

of artistic expression. This period saw an end to the feeling of artistic inferiority to Europe. We had, in other words, caught up with Europe artistically when our economy equaled and began to surpass that of the old world. In literature our novelists and poets frankly and realistically explored American life, chiefly the mid-western. Van Wyck Brooks, in some of his later works, criticized the new confidence in our artistic powers and the richness of subject matter for art in American life. In the graphic arts, the assimilation of the European tradition was gradually becoming complete as great numbers of master works were made accessible in our museums and private collections and European travel became relatively easy. American painting and sculpture had at last caught up with Europe. The period, roughly speaking, between the Spanish American War (the opening of the American imperialist era) and the great depression (1929-1934) marks the coming-of-age of American art as a whole. The vitality of the political movement toward socialism during and following the depression profoundly altered the social orientation of American art under the leadership of the vigorous "proletarian" school of the 'thirties. The literature of the 'forties reflected first united anti-fascist sentiments during the war. The post-war instability of capitalism in decline is being manifested in confusion and pessimism.*

From this brief sketch of how American art has depended on the development of our economy, it is evident that the relationship is at once essential and complex. Each period has a special character determined by the state of production in that period. A number of elements interact in the creation of art, and it is difficult, if not impossible finally, to disentangle them from one another. But in order to understand the way these various elements operate, it is necessary to scrutinize them one by one, causing as little distortion as possible in pulling them out of the context in the whole process of interaction.

* A brilliant, penetrating survey of the relations between English poetry under capitalism (from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries) and production can be found in Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality*, Chapters III to VI, New York, 1948.

2. *Fruits of Technology*

TECHNOLOGY—that is, the instruments and tools of production and know-how at a given stage of development—is a main constituent of the forces of production. Direct and indirect influences of technology on the formation of art objects have heretofore received only the most rudimentary attention; yet upon examination they appear to have had a great impact on creation of art through the centuries.

Art is the beneficiary of technology directly through the agency of new materials and tools that it has made available to artists, and indirectly through its profound effects on consciousness and imagination. Contrary to the popular conception, the artist is not an absolutely free agent. His consciousness is generated by the social life out of which he springs. Because all the arts at any given moment are rooted in the same social life they have a certain coherence, a common point of reference, common stylistic limits and tendencies which arise out of their common state of consciousness. The technological level of a period, which underlies the mode of production, is one basic influence upon this consciousness. For the face that the world presents to the artist to a great extent owes its contours to technology's influence on the form of objects, materials, sights, and sounds which condition the artist's imagination. How greatly, for instance, the noise and motion of machinery and mechanical modes of transportation have affected the modern arts! Technology modifies the materials with which the artist works by changing the face of his environment.

The precise form of artistic illusion and fantasy at any given time is fed by technology and science. Hence modern man could

not create an *Iliad* nor could the ancient Greeks create anything like James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Marx has vividly suggested these contrasted possibilities: "It is a well known fact that Greek mythology was not only the arsenal of Greek art, but also the very ground from which it had sprung. Is the view of nature and of social relations which shaped Greek imagination and Greek [art] possible in the age of automatic machinery, and railways, and locomotives, and electric telegraphs? Where does Vulcan come in as against Roberts and Co.; Jupiter, as against the lightning rod; and Hermes, as against the Credit Mobilier? All mythology masters and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in and through the imagination; hence it disappears as soon as man gains mastery over the forces of nature. What becomes of the Goddess Fame side by side with Printing House Square? . . . Is the *Iliad* at all compatible with the printing press and steam press? Do not singing and reciting and the muses necessarily go out of existence with the appearance of the printer's bar, and do not, therefore, disappear the prerequisites of epic poetry?"¹

Christian art of the Middle Ages was an expression of medieval theology. But that theology was no longer integral to artistic consciousness after its validity was destroyed by science and technology. The survival of that theology in the Catholic Church is essentially external to the modern imagination. Where modern art does utilize it, it is by way of convention, as in Renaissance painting, or in terms of satire or a lifeless clutching at a futile hope, as in James Joyce and T. S. Eliot. Theology has virtually disappeared from modern art; it has been practically non-existent in painting since the late seventeenth century. Scientific and technological advance instead gave rise first to naturalistic techniques in painting and more recently to abstractionism based on scientific principles. The whole history of the imagination is closely tied in with the advance of technology through the effects of the latter on consciousness.

By changes introduced into techniques, raw materials and tools, technology directly influences artistic creation. Art was born together with technology when man first fashioned natural objects to his use. The flexible hand of man lies at the foundation of all technology. The manipulation of nature followed man's

discovery that he could wield tools. Since then technology has never ceased to be of inestimable importance in art creation. This influence upon primitive art was intensively studied by the great American anthropologist Franz Boas, who developed the thesis that there is a "close relation between technical virtuosity and the fullness of artistic development."² Form in art did not arise spontaneously, but owed much to the skilled handling of tools. Boas observed of certain Indian tribes that "the industry in which they have attained greatest proficiency is, at the same time, the one in which their decorative art is most fully developed."³ The very feeling for form was in great part a product of technological experience. Boas shows that elements of design such as the straight line, the plane, and the curve, which rarely occur in nature, emerged from the expert handling of tools. The straight line was the result of splitting or cutting wood, of the use of reeds and other processes; a smooth surface was achieved by expert, automatic, regular strokes of the adze; the circle originated in the regular turning of coiled basketry and coiled pottery; weaving in coarse materials yielded fundamental patterns in triangular figures, checker patterns, steplike diagonals and similar forms. Complete control of a flaking implement resulted in a regular chipped design. Representational art applied the techniques used in tool-making and depended for its excellence on technical proficiency. For instance, the Eskimos carved harpoons and other weapons from antlers or bone, and their best representational carvings and etchings were made with the same tools. The same is true of the delicate wood and stone carving of the New Zealanders. Boas believes that, although the observation of the symmetry of the human body contributed to the feeling for form, art is in large measure indebted to "our reactions to forms that develop through the mastery of technique."⁴

Architecture developed largely as the progressive solution of engineering problems. Hence it is essentially, though not exclusively, technological. The raw materials which technology made available for building, together with the continual discovery of new engineering principles, played a large part in determining architectural form. When the Greeks substituted stone for wood

in the construction of temples, the new material made possible the building of larger structures. The Roman discovery of concrete lies at the technical foundation of Rome's contributions to architecture, the vault and the arch. The new engineering techniques, based upon the unlimited power of support of concrete, resulted in the new forms of the dome (a hemispheric vault) and the great arches, which are such a prominent feature of subsequent civic art in Europe, as well as the more utilitarian aqueducts and bridges. Medieval architects developed the fireplace with a hood over it and a smoke chamber running through the roof. This device for removing smoke from a room quickly and effectively revolutionized domestic architecture.

The crucial advance in Gothic architecture was the flying buttress. Although concrete could withstand any downward thrust, the sideward thrust above a few stories was too much for it. If the tall, overpowering structures they envisaged were to be feasible, Gothic architects had to overcome this limitation of their material, and their solution was the flying buttress. This device successfully absorbed the sideward thrust of any weight, thus enabling them to build to any height they wished. Thence followed the secondary Gothic innovations, the pointed arch, very tall, slim columns, and the decorative features. Large stained glass windows were made structurally possible by the use of armatures, iron frameworks, and leading. Finally tracery, a supporting stone framework, made great rose windows possible.

The course of architecture was radically changed in the nineteenth century by the availability of iron, steel, glass, and the newly discovered ferro-concrete (a network of iron rods through concrete). In the mid-century glass was used as roofing for the Crystal Palace in London and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Iron was used to build bridges, markets, exhibition halls, and bridges. Toward the end of the century Americans, led by Louis Sullivan, exploited these new materials in the creation of the skyscraper. Functionalism, the doctrine that "form follows function," developed also as a result of the increased flexibility made possible by these new materials. The later discovery of structural steel accelerated the new development. This complete revolution in

architecture is exemplified primarily in the works of men like Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and Frank Lloyd Wright.

A technological influence of a different type was exerted by the introduction of printing. Printing does not enter directly into the creative process, as do new materials or new techniques. Printing is essentially a *reproductive* process. The writer does not create with the printing press, but printing reproduces his artistic product and makes possible its dissemination on an infinitely wider scale. Printing therefore helped to affect the course of art by widening the audience for it, and the nature and extent of this audience were an essential determinant of art. Not only did printing enlarge the audience for literature specifically by making works available to large masses of readers, but it was a condition for changing the whole character of modern civilization. For printing was a prerequisite to the spread of education and large-scale development of science and technology: without the mass distribution of books, large-scale dissemination of knowledge is inconceivable. In this way printing was a primary condition for the formation of the modern consciousness and hence of its art.

Printing also throws into relief another basic aspect of technology's significance: technological advance does not exert its influence in atomic, isolated fashion, but in relation to the whole development of production. Everyone knows that although printing was introduced into Europe in the fifteenth century, China had discovered and used printing centuries earlier. Why then did not this revolutionary technique result in the creation of mass education and a phenomenal growth of science in China as it did in the West? Because that country's mode of production, an essentially agricultural type, rendered this impossible. The commercial and industrial development of the West—capitalism—was the indispensable condition for the creation of a mass-produced culture. It is therefore essential to understand that technology modifies the history of art in organic connection with the entire mode of production and not independently.

The flowering of Renaissance painting cannot be understood apart from the triumphant emergence of the new capitalism, for which a new consciousness was required. In every region of

human thought and activity a battle was being waged against medievalism; painting formed an important front in this battle. The medieval painters had not worked directly from nature but from a model "not conceived as a natural object but as an 'exemplar' or 'simile,' that is, another work of art which served as a prototype."⁵ The basis of Renaissance painting was a return to nature, a correlative movement to the necessary growth of science that was a condition for and accompaniment of capitalist development. The scientific, empirical attitude consequently pervaded the art of the time. The exuberant genius of this period spilled over the limits of specialization. Many painters were men of universal genius. Thus we find that the scientific and artistic revolutions were developed to a certain extent by the same men. Hence we find Leonardo da Vinci expressing a mature empirical attitude in his *Treatise on Painting*: "But to me it seems that all sciences are vain and full of errors that are not born of experience, mother of all certainty, and that are not tested by experience, that is to say, that do not at their origin, middle or end pass through any of the five senses."⁶ Medieval thinkers, on the contrary, had based their "science" on logic, not nature and experience.

So it was that momentous scientific advances were made by artists. Though these discoveries were not technological, strictly speaking, since they described basic natural principles, they influenced technological thought. The passion for imitating nature directly drove artists into the study of anatomy. Thus the first anatomical dissection of modern times was made by the great artist Pollaiuolo for artistic purposes. Professional anatomists employed artists to draw the anatomy, for the greater the accuracy of this drawing, the better it guided the hand of the dissectors. Leonardo himself was interested in anatomy from both the scientific and artistic points of view.

One significant contribution of Renaissance art to both science and painting, stimulated by the fight against feudalism, was the development of the theory of perspective. The subject was treated as early as 1435 by Battista in his treatise on painting, and by others. But the most important was probably Leonardo da Vinci's work published in the last decade of the fifteenth century. The problem was conceived as the construction of a three-dimensional

space and objects within it on a two-dimensional surface. Nature was to be presented as it appeared, and not in the conventional, symbolical fashion of the medieval painters. This was achieved through the science of perspective, unknown to both antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Technological change also played a part in that other turning point of modern art, impressionism and the subsequent movements of the nineteenth century. Researches in color, light, and vision sent painters of these restless decades in new directions. Michel Eugène Chevreul, director of dyeing and manufacture at the Gobelins Tapestry Works, made a study of the nature of dyestuffs and the relation of colors in weaving. About mid-century he arranged the color circle for dyes. Colors were arranged on a scientific basis, rather than by the rule of thumb method that had been customary. By dividing the spectrum into the color circle the scientific basis was laid for complementary color relations, the knowledge of which proved so influential in subsequent painting. Painters of the day studied the work of the German scientist Helmholtz and of the American physicist O. N. Rood. The artist Paul Signac tells how artists like Courbet studied Chevreul. George Seurat, Claude Monet, and Camille Pissaro discussed the results of Rood's experiments in mixing colors on revolving discs. These artists concluded that they would use this principle in painting so that the colors in their paintings would be mixed in the eye instead of on the palette. "Divisionism," or "pointillisme," or "divided colors," as Seurat's new method was alternatively called, was the result. There is some doubt whether the neo-impressionists actually achieved the result they intended. The art critic, J. Carson Webster, concluded from an experimental study of divisionist paintings that the colors are not actually mixed in the eye as the painters thought, that the eye does not actually work as a prism with respect to these paintings.⁷ Divided color, he admits, does give a new effect by the interpenetration of colors. But whatever the actual result, there can be no doubt that the new scientific experiments in light, vision, and color did help to change the course of modern painting.

Dissatisfaction with representational art that ultimately gave rise to abstract art, and was stimulated by these researches, was

also abetted by the discovery of photography. When Daguerre, French inventor, announced his momentous invention to the world in 1839, painters were thrown into consternation at this apparent competition. One of their lesser figures remarked, "From today painting is dead." Although the assertion proved to be exaggerated, photography did eventually give painters a stimulus to depart from representational art. Moreover, photography did in one way or another actually influence great painters. Manet, for instance, tried for a period to give "true value" to tonal color effects by using gradations of tinted greys drawn from photography. Meissonier and Ingres of France and some of the British pre-Raphaelite painters tried to simulate photographic effects, as also did Degas, Courbet, Monet, Lenbach, and others. Many artists also used the new medium to save sketching. They photographed their human and natural models and painted directly from the photographs. Degas is known to have painted a portrait from a photograph. Photography was also used instead of sketches in landscape painting. And in America photography killed off the flourishing art of miniature and seriously reduced what was once the most important form of painting in America, portraiture. The dissemination of art was also greatly accelerated by the photographic reproductions of paintings and by printing of photographs in art magazines and books, particularly after 1870.

With photography a technological development becomes an art in itself, an appropriate phenomenon in this era of intensive, infinitely varied technology. The artistic possibilities of the photograph went unrecognized generally for many decades. In the 1870's a Scottish painter, David Octavius Hill, was commissioned to paint portraits of the four hundred churchmen of the First General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. With the help of a few assistants these men were photographed and their portraits painted from the photographs. The photographs are now recognized to be among the earliest and best examples of this art. The American Matthew Brady was another pioneer photographer. Although he left a fine record of photographs of the Civil War and of many leading public figures of his period, it was only later that he was recognized as an artist. Not until the end of the

last century was photography consciously used as an art medium by pioneer Americans like Alfred Stieglitz, who finally succeeded in getting it accepted as a member of the family of the arts.

Out of photography also emerged the typical art form of the monopoly era of capitalism—the movies. The film is as much an industry in the strict sense as it is an art. It partakes of the nature of modern industry in its varied and minute division of labor among craftsmen, technicians, artists of every sort from set designers to writers and musicians. Movies are produced on a mass-production plan like clothing, automobiles, or any assembly-line commodity. Like the Gothic cathedral in its time, the movies are the consummate art expression of our age, taking in virtually all the arts and crafts. Because the technological aspect of the movies is so thoroughly fused with the artistic, this art represents most vividly the significance of technology for art history.

Another technological medium, the radio, has also profoundly affected art development. It is not an art industry in exactly the same way as the movies, for radio, like printing, is to a great extent a *reproductive* rather than a creative art medium. While disseminating the musical and dramatic arts, it has had only limited influence on the creation of new art forms. The radio drama is perhaps the only new art form developed by radio. However, the fusion of radio and movies in television holds the prospects for new forms more complicated technologically than the movies. Even more than the movies television will become the comprehensive art form of a mature industrial society, since its possibilities of dramatic representation combined with the recording of actualities as they happen are almost infinite.

Thus the more important the technological element becomes in the productive process itself, the greater its influence upon the arts. The interrelationship of the two—art and technology—is not yet fully appreciated. Clearly the Marxist approach to art points to and emphasizes the need for extensive research into the vital relationship of technology and the genesis and nature of art. Furthermore, the full impact of these revolutionary technological advances will not be fully felt until the world moves into a socialist economy, for only then can the needed experimentation into their full creative possibilities be explored.

3. *Class and Audience*

IT IS A TRUISM that the artist creates out of the life he has lived. From this flows enormous consequences that are inadequately realized. With the inexorability of physical law the artist's consciousness is locked within prevailing modes of thought and feeling of his time and place. In a class society these modes necessarily have class characteristics and are modified by class struggle. Any effort to understand art without being aware of this inescapable fact is like trying to breathe while immersed in water. The artist reflects these class characteristics in his art. And since art invests its every subject with human feelings, the content of art simply cannot be perceived in its full reality except as a product of class struggle. Where the class nature of art is explicit on the surface, as in neo-classic drama, the critic fails to draw general conclusions about art of all periods. And further, though the critic may acknowledge a class reflection in art in specific instances, he may protest vigorously against the general view that the artist can never create without manifesting sympathy with one class or another. The artist is generally placed above classes—like a god sitting in judgment on human affairs or as a conveyor of permanent, abstract values.

But all art in class society is ideological, that is, has a class orientation. An unbreakable, intimate connection exists between the ideas and feelings expressed in art and their social origin and motivation. Separation of ideas from these conditions is possible but then the ideas lose their full meaning, which includes their social function. The true significance of ideas appears only when they are taken in their social context. Ideas mean far more than their interpretation, and often even something quite

different. Their authors do not necessarily intend to deceive, for they are themselves unaware of this full motivation and meaning. Psychologists have in recent years called this process "rationalization," that is, unconsciously explaining behavior with reasons that are actually an excuse for obscuring the true motive. Similarly ideology is "rationalization" by an entire class, an expression in formal systems of religion, law, philosophy, or art which justify and bolster that class.

Consciousness is a social product and is not spun out of itself as a spider secretes the threads of its web. It is a reflection of the actual relations of men in production; it arises and develops in response to needs of production which are the basic and controlling facts of society. The more advanced the society, the more intricate is the relationship between consciousness and the productive process and the more ideology appears independent of its economic base. We have seen that in primitive classless societies the connection between production and art was stark and immediate. But in the intensively specialized, varied, and complex activities of industrial society these connections are obscured. One function of the critic is to dispel this obscurity by exposing the class expression of the artist, the social origin, and determination of his work and its function in society. Each form of ideology operates in its own sphere to bolster the system of production.

But these ideologies which support the reigning class do not operate unopposed. Often coexisting with them are the ideologies of the class which is contending for power with the ruling class. As classes rise and decline, so do their ideologies. While a class is in the ascendancy, its ideology comprises the over-arching ideas of the period.

"The ideas of the ruling class," wrote Marx and Engels, "are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships . . . grasped as ideas; hence of

the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in their whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age; thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch."¹ But these ruling ideas do not hold the field exclusively. They come into conflict with the opposing ideas of the rising class, and their rise and fall tend to follow the fortunes of the class whose interests they reflect.

The specific problem of ideology in art can be approached through the relationship between artist and audience. For art is essentially a mode of communication and an analysis of this relationship will expose its ideological nature. Art is a relationship involving the artist's work and the audience for whom it is created. Whether or not he does so consciously, the artist directs his work to an audience. If he is an innovator, he creates for an audience that does not yet exist, but which he will help bring into being by his work.

One of the conditions which controls the artist's relation to his audience and its class interests is his means of livelihood—whether he has an independent income, depends on a patron or on a public to which his work is offered in a free market. For the interests, behavior, and demands of the class or classes for whom the artist creates—that is, his audience—to a great extent determine the content of his work, since his means of living derives from it. This relationship is by no means simple, but operates within the whole social context, and so oversimplification must be avoided in relating content to the source of the artist's income.

In the earliest primitive classless societies the link between the artist and his audience was so close that the two could hardly be separated. The primitive craftsman worked in complete harmony with the tribe's objective of facilitating production to sustain life. With the introduction of classes, based on ownership of property, tensions develop between the artist and his audience, and other

class audiences tend to arise. In more advanced societies this division appears in the distinction between "elite" and folk arts. Professional artists are attached to the household of the ruling class, while folk artists perform for the people, and the contents of the respective arts reflect the diverse interests of their audiences. Standards of beauty often differ according to class. The Russian revolutionist Nikolai Chernyshevsky noted the contrasting standards of peasant and aristocratic beauty in women. The peasant demands a fresh rosy complexion that comes from healthy food and wholesome labor, a stocky build because the peasant girl works hard. To the leisurely aristocrat, however, small hands and feet, pallor and languor are criteria of beauty, for these are attributes of life without physical labor.²

The vitality of the artist and the health of his art depend in large measure upon the nature of his class, his closeness to his audience, and upon the degree to which he expresses its aspirations. The enduring validity of folk art is largely attributable to the identity of the folk artist with the folk. Even in periods when the artist was identified with the national aspirations that swept along the whole citizenry, despite class divisions among them, his art was nevertheless oriented toward the ruling class. This was the case in fifth-century (B.C.) Athens. The city was the patron of the artist, who identified himself with the civic feelings of the citizenry. Limited democracy had been established in Athens late in the sixth century B.C. With the victory of Athenian foot soldiers over the Persians in 490 B.C. at Marathon and the great sea victory at Salamis in 480 B.C. the supremacy of Athens in the ancient world was established and an era of prosperity followed. The slaves, however, were excluded from the pervading civic pride. A great citizens' art arose in which slaves did not take part. The city commissioned great public buildings and temples, adorned with great sculpture, which now rank among the highest human achievements. The drama was likewise a civic art which counted the entire citizenry as its audience as few arts have done since. The art of Aeschylus and Sophocles during this half-century of Athenian dominance reached out to all classes except slaves, yet its content was aristocratic. But because of popular participation in the city's political and cultural life, it was not so

rigidly aristocratic, however, as the neo-classic art of seventeenth-century France.

As this brilliant era drew to a close with the Spartan conquest of Athens, the sharpening class struggle had a spokesman in Euripides, whose plays discussed social problems, advocated rights of slaves and foreigners, and the emancipation of women, and attacked war and religion. The critical attitude in these plays reflected the disharmonious social relations that followed the peak of Athenian power and the assault on her supremacy. Thus the content of Greek art was modified as the class interests of the audience underwent change.

In much the same way the drama flowered for the whole people in Elizabethan England about two thousand years later. After the victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the establishment of England as the foremost commercial power in the last two decades of the sixteenth century, the bourgeoisie began to emerge as an independent force. The petty bourgeoisie, allied to the bourgeoisie, was carried along by the bourgeois struggle for power. Thus, there was a tendency in the arts to woo both new powers.* Bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie were feeling their power and hence a vigorous city life was generated. London became a bourgeois city. This new vigor was expressed primarily in the drama. This drama attracted a larger percentage of the people than did any other dramatic form until the movies. As in Athens, taste overlapped class affiliations and the dramatist addressed the whole people. The entire people shared the temporary elation over English ascendancy and the ensuing prosperity. This was manifested in a vital national taste most completely expressed in Shakespeare's plays. Vulgar interpretations of Marxism cast doubt on the validity of historical materialism when confronted with this universality of Shakespeare's appeal. The American scholar, Alfred Harbage, asserts that this phenomenon "resists Marxian exegesis," because Shakespearean drama "belongs to everyone because it was created for everyone."³ The "resistance,"

*A similar bourgeois upsurge in Holland at the time found its expression in painting which appealed to both the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie.

however, arises from Harbage's misunderstanding of Marxism. For Marxism explains why this drama had universal appeal, despite the ruling-class psychology which pervaded it; it was created under the bourgeois upsurge that carried the urban petty bourgeoisie, the worker, and peasantry and hence the nation, along with it, an exuberance of commercial supremacy that crossed class lines.

But this alone does not explain the popular appeal of Elizabethan drama. This drama continued to exploit elements of traditional popular drama and the fundamental realism of the English people as expressed in *Piers Plowman* and the miracle and morality plays. Consequently the appeal of Elizabethan drama crossed class lines. Not only the laboring classes, but the upper classes as well, loved the spectacular elements of this drama—"excitement, the open exhibition of violent and bloody deeds, and the intermixture of seriousness and mirth . . . noise; rant; mere bawdry; shews, irrelevant songs, ballads, jokes, dances, and clownage in general; and lastly, target fighting and battles."⁴ Yet these external features alone cannot account for the universal appeal of Shakespeare. His deep insight into human relations was and remains of permanent interest, and this interest is no monopoly of the upper classes. But the vitality of his drama was an outcome of the sensitive mutual awareness of audience and dramatist. Shakespeare did not write for a single class or for readers or for posterity, but for his immediate, miscellaneous audience in the playhouse, and his art is as permanent as the folk songs which were created for their specific audience, rather than for the ages. It has been estimated that about 13 per cent of London's population—about two in every 15—attended the theater weekly from 1599 to 1609, and the large majority of these were craftsmen, tradesmen, and laborers, while a small minority were professionals and the gentry.⁵ Dramatist and audience were integrated to an extent rarely equaled in modern times.

This approach to Shakespeare from the viewpoint of audience problems is one phase of the materialist approach to literature. The international school of Shakespeare criticism in terms of his audience which has developed in this century is not perhaps fully aware of the materialistic implications of its work. The nineteenth

century had placed Shakespeare in the empyrean as a rootless, almost divine phenomenon, but this modern school has brought him down from the clouds, realizing that Shakespeare, like any artist, is a product of his age and must in the first place be understood as his contemporaries took him. "We are loath to put Shakespeare back into his own age and niche," writes E. E. Stoll,⁶ a leader of this school, which has tried to interpret the problems of the plays by investigating the expectations of his audience. Another scholar of this school, the German L. L. Schuecking, wrote that "the public was an influential factor in determining the art-form."⁷ Many puzzling dramatic questions have been solved by this approach. Nevertheless the class analysis of the content of Shakespeare's plays has lagged far behind. For the close identification of dramatist with a wide audience by no means implies that the play's content was classless. Just as the great Greek dramatists appealed to all classes of the citizenry, even though the bias of Sophocles was aristocratic and that of Euripides toward the lower classes, class tendencies also existed in Elizabethan drama. Whatever class orientation appears in Shakespeare—an extremely subtle problem whose solution is in its infancy—this complex dramatist, taken as a whole, certainly did not express lower class aspirations.

The unity of the Elizabethan audience, however, was as short-lived as the alliance of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Before the end of the sixteenth century, practically the same popular hits were acceptable to the public, private, and court theaters, catering respectively to the general public, the aristocracy, and the court itself. After the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the bourgeoisie in its puritan guise gained in strength over the court, which represented the landed aristocracy. At the end of the sixteenth century the cleavage between court and bourgeoisie had begun to appear in the drama itself. "As hostility between the bourgeoisie and aristocracy increased in the early seventeenth century," writes the American scholar Louis B. Wright, "the drama became more definitely differentiated into types appealing to one or the other social groups."⁸ Playwrights like Beaumont and Fletcher and Middleton, who wrote for the aristocracy, stressed the tradesman's greed, his hypocrisy, dishonesty, and

cowardice, and these plays were naturally distasteful to the bourgeois and artisan. On the other hand, Thomas Heywood appealed to the bourgeoisie because he sympathetically depicted middle class virtues. He upheld the dignity of work, criticised the sycophancy of the court, praised philanthropy, the morality of thrift, truthfulness as a basis of credit, condemned gambling and riotous living as inimical to business, and advocated peace as conducive to trade. With their victory in the Puritan revolution, the bourgeoisie began a campaign to get rid of every aristocratic manifestation and outlawed the theater altogether because it had been dominated by the aristocracy. The Restoration in 1660 brought back a purely aristocratic theater. The patron of the drama and his class became the exclusive theater audience. By the time of John Dryden the dramatists were unashamedly fawning sycophants of their patrons' audience and "scrupulously modelled themselves on their masters and put on an aristocratic veneer; they put in their plays only gallant gentlemen; they adopted their language."⁹

The establishment of modern European languages, the vernacular, as the language of literature and the basis for all future literary development, was itself a direct product of class struggle. The acceptance of Latin as the vehicle for literature and learning had been an integral part of the feudal regime. The new bourgeoisie was struggling for a strong central power, for monarchical absolutism, in opposition to the localized power of the feudal nobility which was supported by the Church. The movement for acceptance of the vernacular was part of this fight against Church power, which had a vested interest in perpetuating Latin as the language of all intellectual life. The Reformation thus advocated the vernacular as a measure to undermine the Church. The translation of the Bible into modern European languages under Reformation auspices was a major element in this battle to unseat the feudal nobility. Protestantism was used by the central authority, vested in the king, as a political instrument against the feudal barons, and the vernacular Bible played an important part in the fight. The class nature of this fight is indicated by the phrase, "the King's English," applied to the

vernacular Bible. These words epitomize the advocacy by the central power of the native language against the Church supporters of the tottering feudal regime.¹⁰

There was also a democratic element in this fight for the vernacular. Besides the need of the bourgeoisie for this language as a medium for science, education, and administration, the bourgeoisie was able to gain power at crucial points only by temporary alliance with the lower classes. For this the bourgeoisie required complete acceptance of the native language as a means of communication with the lower classes and had to grant them—grudgingly—the chance to participate in the culture and political life of the nation. Ultimately the bourgeois economy also demanded an expansion of the literary market, as it did for the whole commodity market, and a native literature was the only means to this end. In fact, the very breadth of the audience for the Elizabethan theater was an indication of this need.

But the full consequences of this aspect of the struggle for the vernacular were not realized until the emergence of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth century. The modern mass audience, or “public,” made its appearance at this time, and with it came a correlative change in the class content of art. Although there had been earlier periods, as in fifth-century Athens and Elizabethan England, when art found an audience in nearly the whole people, the complete identity of artist and audience that prevailed in primitive society has never been duplicated. The classless primitive society was a closely integrated order in which a minimum division of interests existed, and so its art was an uninhibited collective expression. In modern industrial society, however, proportionately greater audiences arose than had existed since primitive times. But the sharply class-divided character of this society had profound effects on the content of art. In the age of Dryden at the end of the seventeenth century there did not yet exist a “public” for the arts (if we exclude the popular Elizabethan audience for the drama), that is, a mass audience that paid for art as they would for any other commodity. “This is the nub of the situation,” writes one authority, “there was no public; neither the thing nor the word existed as yet.”¹¹ As the century drew on,

this public came into being. The industrial revolution had enormously increased populations, had brought a higher standard of living to many, an unprecedented diffusion of education, and a growing consciousness among the petty bourgeoisie and the masses of their worth. The masses were becoming a "market" for the arts.

With few exceptions writers before the eighteenth century could live only by patronage. By the middle of the century, however, the aristocracy losing power, literary patronage was virtually dead and the public was taking the patron's place. Great improvement in the writer's bargaining power was marked by the passage in 1710 of the Copyright Law in England. The reading public expanded. Joseph Addison's periodical, *Spectator*, proved a decisive turning point in the growth of the audience. In its twenty months of existence, from 1711 to 1712, this literary journal increased its circulation from 3,000 to 30,000, an unprecedented figure for those days. All forms of popular reading grew rapidly. A large and devoted audience for the novelists arose. Newspaper circulation increased steadily. Many magazines were established during the century, including provincial and farmers' journals. The first circulating library was founded in London in 1740. Children's books, mostly written by women, took their place in the publishing world. Even pocket editions of the poets appeared in tremendous editions after copyrights lapsed. By the end of the eighteenth century a public for literature was firmly established and the writer could live by his earnings. Readers were "no longer Court or City, Puritan or Cavalier, capital or province; readers were now all England."¹²

The creation of this mass audience was one phase of the transformation of society into an industrial order. The dominant class was now the industrial bourgeoisie, which required an open mass market. The numerical and qualitative changes in the audience brought about changes in ideology. Aristocratic attitudes were on the way out and literature was becoming bourgeois because its exponents and audience were for the most part bourgeois. Middle class drama prevailed and the novel exemplified the new values. With the beginnings of industrialism in the last third of the eighteenth century, the romantic movement emerged. This re-

flected the growing democratic movement spurred by the French Revolution, but it also spelled the alienation of the artist from society. The escape to nature and the wish-fulfilling illusion of the new poetry registered the hostility of hard-boiled industrialism to art and to manifestations of beauty. The return to the language of the people was, on the one side, a reaction against the decadence of the aristocratic tradition, and, on the other, an affirmation of the importance of the people, although the romantics' idyllic conception of the people reflected the immature class position of the emerging proletariat. Changing class relations at the beginning of the industrial phase of capitalism brought increasing numbers of the petty bourgeoisie into the audience for literature and thus influenced its changing content.

This broadening of the audience occurred in all the sophisticated arts. In music it came at about the same time that the patronage system was breaking down and composers were struggling along on their earnings from teaching, sale of their music, and concert performances. There had always been a mass audience for music in folk song and in church music. Until the late eighteenth century, sophisticated secular music was largely limited to noble patrons and their circle—music was for the most part composed for performance in small, aristocratic salons. Hence musical forms were limited to chamber music forms and the intimate symphonies of Haydn and Mozart. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the public concert became more frequent and the orchestra underwent technical changes to conform to the new milieu. A new audience was created and the musician was released from the demands of an elegant aristocracy. Symphonic forms became broader, less restrained, more powerful. A Handel commemoration in London in 1784 used an orchestra of 252 players, a far cry from the small orchestra that had been the rule several decades before.

"There were various causes for stressing the power," writes Curt Sachs in his *History of Musical Instruments*. "The passage from an aristocratic to a democratic culture, in the eighteenth century, replaced the small salons by the more and more gigantic concert halls, which demanded greater volume." There was also a change from "aristocratic reserve to unfettered passion."¹⁸ The

difference between the drawing room symphony of Mozart and the heroic symphonic style of Beethoven measures the difference in character, size, and temper of their respective audiences.

"The rise of a new audience, the middle class," writes Elie Siegmeister, "called for the emergence of a new type of music and a new type of composer. And they did emerge: the music, romanticism; the composer, the bourgeois 'free individual,' writing according to his fancy."¹⁴

The change in audience also had a profound effect on the graphic arts. The example of engraving is revealing. William Hogarth, one of the greatest of English painters and caricaturists, was having a hard time living by his painting. When he married in 1729 he turned to the more lucrative art form of caricature, which was popular in both appeal and content, and he set up his engraving establishment. But his popular series of engravings, *Rake's Progress*, was so mercilessly pirated that he fought for a copyright law and succeeded in getting one passed in 1735. Protection of the artist and the engraver spurred this art form. While there had been only two "print-shops" in London before the passage of the law, now many more sprang up. The effect on the art audience is stated by one historian as follows: "Whilst the works they [the 'print-shops'] exposed to view, by drawing the attention of the public, aided in making artists known, and in diffusing taste for art, they constituted an entirely new characteristic of the metropolis of Great Britain. . . . And thus the British *public* became honourably distinguished as affording the first source of real patronage enjoyed by the British artist."¹⁵

The same pattern of development is thus discernible in all the arts. The decline of the aristocracy in the course of the eighteenth century means the virtual end of the patronage system; the artist is thrown upon the open market and upon a middle class or mass audience for his livelihood. His art is accordingly adjusted to new conditions. And just as writers offered their product on the free market and musicians in the concert hall and the music store, so painters resorted to the public exhibition. After the French Revolution, writes Milton W. Brown, "the public exhibition definitely superseded the stabilized patronage of another day, and although

economic security was gone, the artist welcomed the new vistas of free expression."¹⁶

"The Salon laid the foundation for modern art," he adds, and this too marks the turning point of modern painting. The rapid succession of styles in France, germinal source of painting in the past century, keeps pace with the restless political and economic development of that country. After the neo-classicism of the revolutionary period and of the Napoleonic age, the preparations for and consequences of the Revolution of 1848 brought forth the realism of Géricault and Courbet. This was followed by impressionism, neo-impressionism, and the rapid innovations resulting from the radical technical discoveries from Cézanne through Picasso. These changes were possible because of the new status of the artist as a free creator for the open market. The specific nature of the painting which resulted was a complex expression of many influences, among which, for instance, were the technological elements discussed in the previous chapter. Another important element is the fact that, paradoxically enough, the dependence of the artist upon the public was accompanied by an alienation of the artist from the public. The philistinism of industrial bourgeois society repelled the artist and he resorted to technical experimentation as one escape from the repellent content offered by this society. Content itself was therefore subordinated to experimentation, and the painters for the most part depicted insignificant content or considered content as material for experimentation. Their attitude is epitomized in this statement of Piet Mondrian, one of the most important of recent experimenters: "All Modern Art is distinguished by a greater relative freedom from the oppression of the subject."¹⁷ A major fact about modern painting is that content has become of essentially minor significance and technique has held the center of interest. The class struggle is here expressed in the unprecedented, disjointed relationship of painter to audience and the consequent flight of the artist into technical experiment.

While the conversion of art to a commodity on the free market resulted in the alienation of the sophisticated artist from society, a different relation was established between the creator of popular art and his mass audience. The artist in the mass media had to

remain close to his audience preferences if his product was to sell in great quantities. Since the entrepreneur controlled the mass media, just as he controlled any other mass-production industry, his surveillance over the artist and his product had two aspects: he must see to it that a maximum number of copies of the fiction or song were sold in order to realize a maximum profit; but he also had to control the content of the art so that the ruling position of the bourgeoisie was supported and perpetuated. The owners of the mass media therefore made sure that a demagogic content was given mass art to make it palatable to the public, which meant a distortion and falsification of reality. This involved the conditioning of popular taste in the direction of a content of wish-fulfilment, of a distraction from the harsh realities of working class life. The owner of the mass media demanded of the artists that they depict a life in which bourgeois values were not only not questioned, but were held out as the summit of virtue. Evil was represented as a consequence of individual defect, rather than of social maladjustment; wealth was the reward for superior mentality, good moral habits, and general superior human quality.

Bourgeois control over the content of mass art became tighter as the economy became more monopolistic and centralized, and as the class struggle itself became more sharp. Before the working class was mature and an imminent threat to the bourgeoisie, as in nineteenth-century England, a certain social criticism was possible in the mass arts, as in the novels of Dickens, which were originally published in periodical form in enormous editions. But in our own day, when the capitalist system is undergoing world crisis, control over content is drastic and the mass media exploit a fantastic picture of social life which tends to deaden protest and lull the working class into acquiescence to the capitalist order. The movies, radio, magazines, pulp fiction, popular novels, comics, and all mass media today are all pervaded by the same drugged, wish-fulfilment content and reinforcement of the values of capitalist society. Thus this art is controlled by the interests of its owners, who create a demand in their audience for a corrupt, debilitating content.

Does the artist necessarily express in his work the attitudes and modes of thinking of the class to which he himself belongs? The vulgar conception that an artist must express the aspirations of his class must be at once discarded. For it is obvious that throughout the history of art, artists did not necessarily express their personal class interests, but those of their patron or audience. Very often artists of the laboring class have created works in the upper class mold while artists originating in the upper classes have espoused the cause of the oppressed classes. Tolstoy and Shelley are striking examples of the latter, for both stemmed from the aristocracy and both, in their own way, supported revolutionary movements. Lenin observed that Tolstoy was a "mirror of the Russian Revolution" of the nineteenth century. Tolstoy pictured the essential phases of the revolution so far as it touched the peasantry, but his limited view was a measure of its weakness, its inability to envisage the consummation of the Revolution. "Belonging mainly to the epoch of 1861-1904," continues Lenin, "Tolstoy as an artist and as a thinker and preacher embodied in his works, with striking clearness, the historic characteristics peculiar to the entire first Russian Revolution, its strength and its weaknesses."¹⁸ Hence the class content of Tolstoy's work does not express the aspirations of his own aristocratic class. Another example is the aping of court ideas, manners, and language by writers of seventeenth-century England, who were not themselves members of the aristocracy. We must therefore conclude that no regular, systematic relationship exists between the class content of an art work and the class to which the artist belongs.

While social content is explicit in works like the novels of Tolstoy or of Balzac, Zola, or the American realists, or in the paintings and drawings of Breughel, Daumier, Hogarth, the early Van Gogh, Kollwitz, or Gropper—to cite a few typical examples—there is a great area in art where the social meaning is not immediately evident. When the life and conditions of the laboring classes are represented in art, we tend to characterize it as class-conscious, because it is in opposition to the ruling class, while representations of the life of the ruling class are taken for granted as non-social. For instance, Breughel's paintings of peas-

ants in the fields or at a wedding feast are viewed as social while Botticelli's *Primavera* is not. Yet this latter painting, as well as much of Renaissance painting, embodies upper class attitudes and the splendor and accoutrements of the ruling class of that period. They display that "conspicuous consumption" and "conspicuous leisure" that Veblen has associated with the leisure class, both in the finery of clothing and drapery and in the literary classical ideas which these paintings use. The art of any time can be approached in a similar manner, since it necessarily exemplifies the dress, manners, and attitudes of the time.

The greatest difficulty is encountered in discerning the class character of art treating so-called "universal" subjects, like love and other human emotions which occur in every period and do not appear to be related to a specific era. But a more careful examination shows that the concrete modes of expressing these emotions do in fact differ. These universal emotions are generally expressed in the style of the time, with the special connotations conveyed by the varying period styles. Each style bears the imprint of prevailing moods and attitudes, which are ideological. On the surface love poetry of different eras seems to express feelings common to all ages. But conceptions of love do in fact differ in different ages, varying with the position of woman in society. Thus medieval love is chivalric and essentially clandestine, for it was generally adulterous. The love poetry of the Elizabethan, metaphysical, neo-classical and romantic poets varies with the social and class outlook of their times.

The artist at any time therefore reflects his age, of which class struggle is the central feature. But it would be a mistake to see direct and crude expressions of class struggle in art, for this ideological phase of complex societies is related to the underlying forces through a complicated system of intermediary elements so as often to make the face of art remote from these basic antagonisms. Whether or not an artist creates explicitly on social themes, his work is ultimately related to the dynamic struggles of his society. That the artist has a part in class struggle is indisputable; but his exact position in it is a matter of careful, concrete investigation in which the intricacies of ideological relationships must be carefully analyzed.

4. *Molding of Form*

IT IS NOT TOO HARD to grasp the relation of social content in art, when explicit, to political ideologies, but the problem of form is more subtle, since form involves not only ideas but sensuous structure as well. Structure must be translated into social meaning and intention. It is thus understandable that historical materialism in art has thus far been occupied more with content than with form. Engels was acutely aware of this in his last years. "It is the old story," he wrote, "form is always neglected at first for content."¹ The imbalance is still in process of being righted.

Bourgeois scholars have increasingly recognized the obvious inadequacy of treating an art form as a self-developing mental product that grows out of its inner possibilities alone in a strictly technical way. But these scholars usually draw upon the non-technical aspects of art—social origins and formative influences—in an unsystematic way. Older works like George Saintsbury's monumental *History of Criticism* virtually ignore such influences. This work is useful in so far as it gives the bare content of theories of poetry in the West. But Saintsbury did not recognize or discuss the conditions that gave rise to theories of poetry, so that his account of them in the end misses their full significance. In Volume II of his history, Saintsbury summarizes in six pages the momentous social changes at the opening of the Renaissance; in the following 560 pages he forgets about them. Yet poetry is closely linked with the whole life of men. In poetry, as in all art, material conditions guide the course of formal development. The choice of some rather than other paths of technical growth can be explained only by underlying material conditions. Engels

pointed to the interlocking of the inner growth of a technique with its guidance by external forces, as follows:

"Every ideology, however, once it has arisen, develops in connection with the given concept-material, and develops this material further; otherwise it would cease to be ideology, that is, occupation with thoughts as with independent entities, developing independently and subject only to its own laws. That the material life conditions of the persons inside whose heads this thought process goes on, in the last resort determine the *course* of this process, remains of necessity unknown to these persons. . . ." (Italics mine—*L.H.*)

The materials of which each art is made have a logic and law of their own. One set of laws applies to spatial relations in the graphic arts, another to color combinations, another to the relations of tones in music, another to poetic imagery. The formal organization of such sensuous elements as pitches, colors, lines, spaces, rhythms and of ideas and feelings as well follow patterns dictated by the nature of these materials. The relations of notes in the scale, of colors in the prism, of tempos and rhythms, of the spaces in design, though seemingly infinite, are fixed by nature and utilized by man for his artistic purposes.³

Form in art consists in the organization of these elements—pitches, colors, rhythm, spatial relations, words and their connotations—into structures. But separation of form from content is in the last analysis impossible, since form is defined by content, and vice versa. The more concretely we examine form, the more we become involved in content. The farther we get from content, the more abstract the consideration of form becomes. The analysis of the form of tragedy in general may be highly abstract, but work with the structure of *Hamlet* or any specific play is saturated with content. The organic unity of form and content is the concrete work of art. And just as we saw in the last chapter that content has little significance apart from those material and social forces which account for it, so also form is a social product. The objective, unchangeable nature of the basic elements of form is only a limiting condition of their combination. But the actual combinations of these elements into artistic forms is determined by social forces outside the art media themselves. This is another

way of saying that the development of form is determined by the artist as a total social being, that the artist works with his whole mind and not a special technical compartment of it. The artist's consciousness is part of the consciousness of his time and so are the forms with which he works also manifestations of it.

The succession of forms that actually appear in the arts are therefore a product of social forces acting within the objective limitations of the medium. For instance, the reversion to Greco-Roman classical forms at several stages of modern art history was in each case essentially prompted by social demands. Great social changes require not only that objective forces and relations be modified, but also that the minds of men be motivated to make those changes. Art plays a part in this motivation. Sentimental bourgeois art forms prevailing before the French Revolution could not supply the motivation for the heroic action required. The inspiration to heroism was found in the classical Roman models. Revolutionary politicians assumed the mantle of Roman republican heroes and contemporary artists adopted artistic forms of the ancient Romans. In the same way, Marx has observed, Cromwell and the English people found inspiration for their bourgeois revolution in the Old Testament. Milton sang like a prophet of the Old Testament. In the struggle against the feudal power, Renaissance artists returned to classical forms and principles. Thus technical principles alone cannot account for these revivals of classical forms. Among those technical possibilities inherent in any stage of formal development, those are brought to realization which answer the social demands of the time and are conditioned by social forces working on the artist. Technological change, shifts in the scheme of values brought on by class struggle, prevailing social, political, economic, and scientific thought—all these influence the development of form.

A striking illustration of the way form depends on social development is the so-called "Law of Frontality." Similarity of form has been observed in the sculpture of early Greece, old China, Japan, Persia, Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and early Christian art. The sculptural figures in all these cultures exhibit similar features: the figure invariably faces front in full view; it is rigid,

without bending to either side at the neck, abdomen or knee; and a line drawn from head to toes divides the figure into two symmetrical halves. It is generally admitted that the wide separation in time and space of all these cultures precludes derivation of one from another. What, then, did these civilizations have in common to produce the same formal features in sculpture? All these societies were feudal and hieratic with a rigid class system, and the source of their common sculptural form lies there. It cannot be argued, for instance, that the technical tradition for a freer sculpture did not exist for early Christian artists, since the whole of Greek and Roman sculpture could have been their heritage. But social conditions over centuries had caused a rejection of this tradition. Consequently it lay dormant until it was revived during the Renaissance. Frontal sculpture was more congenial to the feudal mentality under the specific social and economic pressures of the static feudal order in which this type of sculpture flourished. Frontal sculpture reflected the inflexibility and rigidity of that order and suggested the dignity and power assigned to the gods and nobles under this system.⁴

Frontal sculpture in Greece changed late in the sixth century when the despotic order itself was dissolving, trade was increasing, and a limited democracy was being introduced. As social relations in society relaxed, a correlative change took place in sculptural form. Sculptors relaxed their figures: they placed one foot before the other, the arms were bent and set out from the side of the body, the body itself began to turn. Full bodily freedom was finally achieved in the great period of fifth-century art during the height of Athens' commercial supremacy and democracy. At the same time, and for the same reason, the drama also developed from the Dionysian ritual to the stage presentation with several actors and a chorus. The release of trading and democratic forces conditioned this flowering of the fifth-century Greek mind. Class distinctions in this society also in part explain the form of its sculpture and vase paintings. Because of its association with dignity and nobility, a survival from the earlier art, the frontal position persisted, but in liberated form, for the aristocracy and the gods. But in the depiction of the lower classes, bodily attitudes were free and informal, like the satyrs in the pediment of the

Parthenon. While the beards of the high-born are neat and clean, those of the laboring class are wild and disheveled. Still later, in the fourth century, when society itself had become more mobile and movement between the classes freer, the informality which had previously been restricted to lower class figures now became more general and was used even for the gods. Realism pervaded the arts. Instead of serving the city, as in the great fifth century period, art now catered to private patrons and portraiture became the dominant art form.

An ambitious attempt to discover the social roots of art form was made by the German art historian, Wilhelm Hausenstein.⁵ Style, he maintained, is a product of culture, is a translation into an artistic medium of the specific mode of an age's vitality. Each age finds its particular "form-feeling" in art, which expresses the social configuration of the age. Hausenstein ingeniously selects as the test of this view the style in which the nude figure has been depicted in the graphic arts through the centuries. This investigation is in the nature of a controlled experiment, for one unchanging phenomenon, the nude figure, remains constant throughout the experiment, while style changes with the social order. Variations in the type of nudes selected by each period and the expressive treatment of the nude from one period to another provide a key to the social significance of style. A comparative study such as Hausenstein has made reveals how artistic ideology, expressing underlying material conditions, is manifested in style: the dignified, rigidly frontal archaic Greek nudes; the freedom and fine proportion of the fifth-century Greek nudes; the informality and realism of the nude in the mobile Hellenistic society; the severe, frontal austerity of the rare nudes in early Christian art; the amplitude and vigor of nudes of the Renaissance and baroque periods during the primary accumulation of capital; the sensual and trivial treatment of the nude during decaying French absolutism, as in the nudes of François Boucher; the distortion of the human figure for social satire in the English caricaturists and in the French artist Honoré Daumier; the assertiveness of the nudes in the new democratic realism of Gérault and Delacroix; and the bewildering variety of treatment of

nudes in the bourgeois world of the past seventy years. Changes in style throughout keep pace with changing social conditions, demonstrating that the history of style is rooted in the history of society itself.

It would be wrong, however, to believe that a single style, or school, completely expresses its period. The dominant style or styles of an era are those of the ruling class. However, exponents of the rising class diverge from the ruling class in style. The class struggle is also fought on this level. One universal phenomenon of class societies is the coexistence of elite and popular types of art which express their respective classes. A striking example of this class contrast in art styles is the work of the Le Nains brothers in seventeenth-century France. These painters took lower class people as their subject and employed a realistic technique. Consequently their work was rejected by the arbiters of current aristocratic taste. One contemporary critic dismissed the Le Nains as "painters in an ignoble style of simple and unbeautiful objects."⁶ These artists were neglected by their contemporaries. Interest in them was stimulated, however, in the late eighteenth century as a result of Rousseauism, but they did not achieve full recognition until the middle of the nineteenth century.

"The rediscovery of the Le Nains," writes Stanley Meltzoff, "was explicitly connected by their discoverer [Champfleury] in the processes of the Revolution of 1848. The Le Nains were revived as instruments in the underground democratic struggle against the dictatorship of Napoleon III, and their revival intensified the conditions which brought it about."⁷ Both in the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries the painting of the Le Nains threatened the classicism of painters representing the ruling class. Champfleury thus expresses this class contrast of styles: the Le Nains "liked the poor, preferred to paint them rather than the powerful, had the aspirations of a La Bruyère for the fields, were not afraid of the baseness of their subject-matter, found men in breeches more interesting than courtiers in lace, . . . fled academic teaching in order to put their own sensations on canvas."⁸

The class struggle is waged more or less directly in the clash of forms within art itself. The exigencies of that struggle conse-

quently play their part in the molding of art forms. Without a grasp of social forces the origin of drama in Greece cannot be understood, for this was a product of the democratic life of the city. Aristotle observed that the people of Megara claimed comedy "in Greece as having arisen when Megara became a democracy."⁹ A comparison of Aristotle's conception of tragedy and comedy in his *Poetics* with the strictly formalistic interpretation given to his views over a thousand years later reveals the contrasting social orders under which both the original and the imitators flourished. Tragedy, wrote Aristotle, represented "noble actions and those of noble personages."¹⁰ His definition is only partly based on the class status of the characters. Tragedy tended to center upon the aristocracy because the important civic events that tragedy demanded were led by the ruling classes. However, Aristotle makes clear that in theory tragedy is not necessarily limited to such personages. The goodness required of tragic characters, he writes, "is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is perhaps an inferior and the other a worthless being."¹¹ Comedy, according to Aristotle, deals with inferior people, not in the class sense, but in the sense of the ridiculous, which he did not restrict to the laboring classes. The comedies of Aristophanes, for instance, include high persons in ridiculous aspects. This degree of class freedom in Greek drama reflects the democratic liberties of the citizenry and its full participation in the life and government of the city. Although the attitudes pervading the drama of Sophocles were aristocratic, Euripides tended to sympathize with oppressed groups. But it is clear that the form of Greek drama was molded by limited democracy and attendant social conditions.

The Aristotelian principles of the drama were revived during the Renaissance as one phase of the revolt against feudalism, when classical art forms supplanted the feudal. The sharper class distinctions in Renaissance society were reflected in the greater rigidity of the Renaissance interpretation of these principles, which became inviolable "laws." Whereas Aristotle based the distinction between comedy and tragedy in part on the human quality of characters and action regardless of class, Renaissance theorists distinguished them on strict class lines.

Tragedy was exclusively concerned with the life of the nobility, comedy with the life of the middle classes. A statement of a French sixteenth-century critic is typical: "Instead of comic characters, who are of low condition, kings, princes and great noblemen are introduced into tragedy."¹² This theory prevailed all through Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One of its corollaries was the principle of "decorum," that is, the rule that language and manners in tragedy should not step out of the bounds of the ruling class, while comedy should use the common speech and manners of the lower classes. All class distinctions in real life were to be observed in the drama.

These "laws" were scrupulously followed in France while, significantly enough, they were constantly violated in English dramatic practice. Shakespeare was criticized by both English and French critics for permitting "low" characters and language and for introducing comic material into his tragedies. The explanation of this greater freedom of English practice and the failure to hew to class lines in drama lies in the intimate connection of English playwrights with their popular audience, and this is finally attributable to the early beginnings of the bourgeois revolution in England. Since the English dramatists were writing for a mixed class audience, they modified the neo-classical class "laws" and created with greater realism than their French contemporaries, whose social order was more rigid. Nevertheless, despite the presence of much lower class material, the heroes of English tragedy were limited to the nobility, for "decorum," even if loosely observed on the stage, was part of the same class pattern under which sumptuary laws were enforced at this time prescribing quality of dress according to social rank.

Neo-classicism in the drama fades with the decline of the aristocracy. As the bourgeoisie gathers strength and approaches dominance, its influence on dramatic form becomes stronger. Opposition to the aristocracy arose at the end of the sixteenth century in England, the most advanced capitalist country, and the middle class drama emerged in protest against the licentiousness of the aristocracy and against the contempt for the bourgeoisie that pervaded the drama. In France the middle class

asserted itself in the drama in the eighteenth century, when it was growing in economic importance. Beaumarchais expressed the bourgeois discontent with the neo-classical theory and practice of limiting tragedy to the nobility and comedy to the middle class. "Depict the middle classes crushed and miserable?" he exclaimed. "None of that! One must show them only to scoff at them! The citizenry ridiculous and royalty unhappy—there's the whole theater for you!"¹⁸ A bourgeois drama arose that protested against and criticized the aristocracy. This drama sentimentally idealized the middle class and was a weapon in strengthening the petty bourgeoisie, whose most influential exponent was Rousseau. It was the bourgeoisie that won dominance in the French Revolution. But the staid, uninspired middle class morality could not sustain and inspire a country moving toward revolution. French dramatists found the inspiration they needed during the second half of the eighteenth century in a revival of the revolutionary heroes of Rome, and dramatic form once again changed into a sort of classicism. At the same time a classical movement arose in painting, whose leading advocate was Jacques Louis David. After the bourgeoisie became firmly established in the nineteenth century, middle class drama returned to the ascendancy.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the oppressive evils of capitalism brought forth the "problem play," that dramatic form in which current social problems, particularly of the oppressed classes, were sympathetically debated. In the modern world Henrik Ibsen gave this dramatic form its impetus. The masses of Ibsen's Norway were thoroughly petty bourgeois. Without a foundation in the working class and devoid of its social theory, Ibsen's plays were pessimistic and left unsolved the main problems he attacked. In France, at about the same time, a school of dramatists, of whom Eugene Brieux was foremost, were impelled to protest against the prevailing social evils. They founded the *Théâtre Libre* in the 'eighties to produce problem plays in the same naturalistic vein as Emile Zola's novels. This movement was reinforced by Ibsen's influence. In England the Independent Theater, founded in the 'nineties more directly under the aegis of Ibsen-

ism, produced problem plays of the Fabian Socialist George Bernard Shaw. Germany, too had its theater of protest in the *Freie Buehne*, whose chief playwright was Gerhart Hauptmann, author of the great working class play, *The Weavers*.

Under the impact of the depression of the 1930's the problem play developed further in the United States into a new dramatic form, the "Living Newspaper." The germ of this new form first appeared in the non-commercial Left theater, and the form reached fruition under the W.P.A. Federal Theater Project. Although no enduring works in this form have yet been produced—its use was curtailed at the death of the Project—it is a thoroughly modern form which reflects the politically articulated and advanced consciousness of its creators. It is a politically explicit vehicle in which actual utterances of historic figures, citations of statistics, quotations from the daily press, and social facts are incorporated into a dramatic argument to drive home a thesis on live social issues.

This correlation between social change and formal development in the drama, which we have sketched in broad strokes, is not accidental but demonstrates the guiding influence of social pressures on artistic form. For the logical evolution of the possibilities within the form itself cannot alone explain its development. We have tried to suggest here how within the technical logic of the dramatic form its development was governed by socio-economic developments.

Students of the novel generally agree that the novel is the typical art form of the bourgeois period. Arising out of capitalistic social conditions, the novel became perhaps the most concentrated medium of artistic expression of the bourgeoisie and other classes. The germs of the novel are the prose tales of late Greece and Rome. This tradition, fed by the epic, was elaborated in the medieval prose romances. But the modern novel was a conscious revolt against the feudal romances. Montaigne, one of the earliest exponents of the modern spirit, called medieval romances "trash." Cervantes' *Don Quixote* ridiculed them to death by exposing their disharmony with current life and conceptions. The Italian tales of Boccaccio and

others were introduced into England in translation in the latter part of the sixteenth century. The first English novel was John Lyly's *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, published in 1579. It was, as might be expected, aristocratic in intention and appeal, since the aristocracy was still the dominant class in society. But several decades later the middle class asserted itself in the novels of Greene, Nashe and Deloney. As the British scholar J. W. H. Atkins says: "A strong and self-conscious middle class was emerging from the ruins of feudalism, and the commons were becoming alive to the interests of their class. Hence, now for the first time, they made their way into literature, and the treatment of their affairs became the secondary aim of this prose fiction."¹⁴ The novel was not established in its full modern form, however, until the appearance of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719, in which bourgeois economic principles were directly exemplified. Shortly afterward the individualism ushered in by capitalism received sharp expression in Samuel Richardson's preoccupation with the feelings and sentiments of middle class people. In *Pamela*, the bars were now completely down on the social status of characters treated in literature. "It is certain," writes L. Cazamian, "that *Pamela* [1740], besides being the first notable English novel of sentimental analysis, heralded the advent of everyday manners and common people to artistic acceptance."¹⁵

The rise of the novel cannot thus be explained solely in terms of the logic of the art form. The novel form adjusted itself to the large audience created by capitalism in the eighteenth century. Since the novel was thrown on the free market, its survival and development depended on satisfying the interests and needs of those who paid for it. Its buyers were the rapidly increasing middle class, which was growing in affluence and power. The novel form continuously developed in response to the changing needs and character of its public. For it can be said of an art form: by its public shall you know it.

Reaction to the sentimentalism of Richardson rapidly generated into the earthy realism of Henry Fielding, representing in the novel form the opposition of the bourgeoisie to the landed aristocracy. For the novel is a mirror of society and the

social relations within it. Yet the disintegrating tendencies of capitalist society made it almost insuperably difficult for the novelist to portray these relationships as they really were. Intensified individualism early brought about tentative steps toward the dissolution of the novel form in the novelist's concentration upon the individual and his feelings. This tendency showed itself particularly in Laurence Sterne, who virtually abandoned plot, concentrated on the study of the individual, and indulged his capricious imagination in devastating commentary upon mankind. The intense development of individualism continued in the psychological novels of Dostoevsky, in Proust and in the ultimate dissolution of the traditional novel form in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Bourgeois development was variously reflected in the romanticism of Sir Walter Scott, in the different degrees of realism from Jane Austen to Charles Dickens, in the social novels of William M. Thackeray and Anthony Trollope, in the quietistic gentility of writers like Mrs. E. C. Gaskell (at least, in *Cranford*). The greatest nineteenth-century novelists, Balzac and Tolstoy, came close to depicting the real relations of men in their time, within the limitations of a society in which the working class had not yet reached maturity. As the working class grew in power, just as the drama developed the problem play in response to the inescapable evils of capitalism, so there also developed the naturalistic novel in which the position of the working class was more or less sympathetically represented and bourgeois society criticized. But just as the social dramatists were unable to present a solution to the problems they dramatized because they were not radical critics of that society, so social realists like Emile Zola and Theodore Dreiser left their problems unanswered. At the same time, the novel tended to crowd out poetry as a healthy art form. The poet lost contact with society. The philistinism of industrial society both alienated the artist from that society, and blunted the esthetic sensitivity of the poetry audience, which was lured into the easier pleasures of prose narrative. This spelled the decline of the poetry audience and the novel's complete conquest of the reading public. The commercial exploitation of the novel finished off poetry as a thriving art form, for the time being at least. Essentially then,

the novel developed as a social product, and not simply as a self-evolving technique. Thus the history of the novel follows the exigencies of the bourgeois mode of production.

If the novel is the typical bourgeois art form, the movies can be said to be the archetypal form of a mature industrial society. This applies to both the finance capitalism of the capitalist countries and to the socialized mode of production in the Soviet Union, for the film has developed simultaneously in both types of society. Mass production brought about those infinitely varied technological discoveries that made the film possible. In capitalist countries, enormous concentration of wealth was a condition for the vast capital, equipment, and the attraction of first-class talent to the movie industry, plus the availability of the most numerous mass audience ever known for an art form. Monopoly capitalism and Soviet socialism have in common the concentrated social form of production and hence both developed the movie art form. But differences in techniques and content also developed as a result of the contrasting ideologies of the two civilizations.

Appropriately enough, the film is the great, climactic, "socialized" art form in its co-ordinated use of drama, song, painting, music, factual pictorial reporting, as well as the complex techniques of photography and sound reproduction. Monopoly control of this industry, because of its high capitalization, has also made this medium under capitalism an agency for promoting reactionary social values. The profit potential of the film is very high because of its universal audience, subjecting this art form to abject commercialism. Under capitalism the film is organized as an industry and pursued exclusively as a profit venture. Naked commercialism has been mitigated by artistic integrity only when, in the opinion of the movie magnates, it has promoted profit-making. The social determination of this art form is therefore evident because of its importance in forming mass ideology and because the profit motive is pervasive and hidden. In contrast, the development of the film in the Soviet Union has shown how this art form can be put to the social use of enlightening the masses and of deepening their cultural values.

5. *Dialectic of Tradition*

"HISTORY," wrote Marx and Engels, "is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which exploits the materials, the forms of capital, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding ones, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity."¹ From this statement emerge the essential traits of tradition: dependence of the present on the past for its materials and forms, which are transformed and supplemented as they pass through living social conditions and in turn exert an influence on those conditions. So basic is tradition to every phase of life, including the forms and content of art, that its absence would compel each generation to start life at the lowest stage of existence.

Like form and content, so technique, with which they are intimately connected, owes its continuity and state at any time in large part to tradition. Like any discipline, technique is founded on the accumulation and transmission of a special body of knowledge. This is basically true of all forms of labor. Techniques of the arts are like those of any labor skill and require an apprenticeship during which the aspiring artist learns the available knowledge of the craft, and tradition is stored up. Each art demands a special skill in the translation of subject matter into a concrete artistic medium. The sculptor must know how to chisel stone, shape wood or metal into the desired form. The painter must know how to apply color, must be skilled in the principles of design. The musician must be conversant with the possibilities of tonal combination and

rhythmic pattern. The writer must exercise his talent with the various principles of literary form. In each case the artist must know the techniques employed by his predecessors.

But the genuine artist never works within the limits of the techniques that he has learned. He adapts these techniques to the new subject matter that each generation offers. In other words, technique is used dialectically: it is adapted to current problems and modified accordingly, and in its turn gives new form to the subject matter. The failure to make this adaptation is "academicism," or the sterile use of tradition yielding moribund art. When a particular tradition is exhausted because the new demands of society can no longer be expressed within it, new techniques are discovered and exploited by leading talents. Thus the revolutionary changes in life wrought by the industrial revolution in America called forth in Walt Whitman the loose, powerful technique of free verse in which the sprawling hugeness of radical democracy coming to self-consciousness could be expressed. On the other hand, more recent poetry has become isolated from society and concentrated on new techniques in which are expressed either a recondite, exquisite beauty or the frustration of the artist in bourgeois society. The increasing experimentation in painting since the 'seventies of the last century represents the efforts of that art to hit upon techniques in which the restless bourgeois mind of declining capitalism can find rest.

The perpetual conflict of the borning and the dying which is the substance of class struggle is thus reflected in tradition. Alterations in artistic tradition proceed at varying rates of speed. Tradition has its periods of gradual development and its revolutionary leaps in response to social changes. Experimentalism is the immediate agency of conflict in tradition. The experimental phase both prepares and hastens a revolutionary crisis in art during revolutionary eras in society, until the innovation becomes accepted tradition, just as social change becomes the prevailing state of society itself. Thus we have recently witnessed in music a departure from harmony and the gradual acceptance of what was previously regarded as "discordant." This is not a case of absolute novelty because "discordant" music is at least

as common as harmony in the history of music (for instance, music of the Middle Ages was regularly "discordant"). This type of music was an innovation in this century, however, because harmony had prevailed for several hundred years. The twentieth century has also seen the rise of an explicitly functional style in architecture, in which new materials like chromium steel, structural glass, and reinforced concrete—supplied by technological discoveries—freed the architect in an unprecedented way from the limitations of previous techniques. The restless bourgeois spirit has also seen a break with the ballet tradition in the dance and the creation of new modern idioms that use recent developments in graphic design and in which the influence of the machine is plainly evident. Similarly, in the past, critical changes in society were reflected in painting in breaks with older techniques: Italian painting of the fourteenth century, Dutch painting in the seventeenth, French painting of the nineteenth and twentieth. Often changes in art styles are symptomatic of latent diseases in society before they have broken out in overt malignancy, like the artist's alienation from society in the romanticism of Keats.

Tradition is thus an inescapable, though not the sole, determinant of the form and content of all art. Engels' comment on philosophy is equally true of art and every form of ideology: "But the philosophy of every epoch, since it is a definite sphere in the division of labor, has as its presupposition certain definite intellectual material handed down to it by its predecessors, from which it takes its start."² When an artist struggles to mold his materials, he cannot produce something absolutely novel. He utilizes materials given to him by the past, by his own experience, by the accumulated experience of society. But in his hands they fall into a new relationship to current needs and conditions, and the result, if successful, is an original work of art. Tradition is the base from which the artist is elevated in his relatively few years of life and training to a level of creation that humanity has taken centuries to prepare. However unique or revolutionary the work of any artist, he could achieve nothing without an assimilation of the past. The exact lineaments of his creation depend in large

measure upon those areas of tradition that he happens, according to his time and circumstances, to have traversed. Tradition taunts the artist in words that Hegel spoke of his followers: "When me they fly, I am the wings." Thus tradition in art is absolutely inescapable, being part of an ineluctable past. While historical materialism makes full allowance for this, it interprets tradition in a dialectical way. Tradition is not determined autonomously, or determined by vaguely conceived "social conditions," but by a complex set of conditions whose driving force derives ultimately from the mode of production. Engels wrote: "... In all ideological domains tradition forms a great conservative force. But the transformations which this material undergoes spring from class relations, that is to say, out of the economic relations of the persons who execute these transformations."⁸

Any understanding of the genesis of art must therefore include the element of tradition. No matter how explicitly the artist may depart from the past performance of his medium, he builds upon it willy-nilly because his very knowledge of the medium is in fact an assimilation of its history. He may be preoccupied with its immediate past only; yet in that case he is dealing with the summation of the whole past, because each generation absorbs that accumulation of past experience that is adaptable to its present needs. But tradition does not operate independently. Those portions of the immediate past and sometimes distant past are utilized under pressure of the full requirements of consciousness at a particular time. For instance, T. S. Eliot's return to seventeenth-century poets like John Donne was not an arbitrary selection from the past, but was prompted by his rejection of the romantic tradition that arose by breaking with the classical tradition of the seventeenth century. And Eliot rejected romanticism fundamentally because he attributed to the romantic consciousness the cause of the spiritual decay of modern society as a consequence of the bourgeois revolution. Artistically Eliot rejected the fruits of industrial capitalism, but in practice he supported it by Toryism in politics. The crucial determinant of Eliot's traditionalism

was the impact of philistinism and, more deeply, a sensitive perception of the sterility of bourgeois life.

Thus tradition does not constitute an independent or even a decisive force in determining art form and content: it is a limiting condition itself determined by ideological needs. The whole consciousness of a period, reflecting class struggle, leads to the selection of that part of the past that must be incorporated into the present. In a sense, tradition is a mass of ideological material developed in past struggles that is infused with new life and molded to new uses by present social needs. Socio-economic demands are the active elements that draw traditional material into currency. This operation is amply illustrated by the revivalist movements in the arts through the centuries. The aid of influential and meaningful traditions in art are often enlisted in class struggle. Marx has brilliantly shown how the French Revolution drew upon the heroic Roman tradition and how the Puritan revolution called upon the Biblical tradition.

"Hegel remarks somewhere," wrote Marx, "that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. . . .

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language. Thus Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better than to parody, in turn, 1789 and the revolutionary tradition of

1793 to 1795. In like manner the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit of the new language and can produce freely in it only when he moves in it without remembering the old and forgets in it his ancestral tongue.

"Consideration of this world-historical conjuring up of the dead reveals at once a salient difference. Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Napoleon, the heroes, as well as the parties and the masses of the old French Revolution, performed the task of their time in Roman costume and with Roman phrases, the task of releasing and setting up modern *bourgeois* society. The first ones knocked the feudal basis to pieces and mowed off the feudal heads which had grown from it. The other created inside France the conditions under which free competition could first be developed, the parcelled landed property exploited, the unfettered productive power of the nation employed, and outside the French borders he everywhere swept the feudal formations away, so far as was necessary to furnish bourgeois society in France with a suitable up-to-date environment on the European Continent. The new social formation once established, the antediluvian Colossuses disappeared and with them the resurrected Romans—the Brutuses, Gracchi, Publicolas, the tribunes, the senators and Caesar himself. Bourgeois society in its sober reality had begotten its true interpreters and mouthpieces in the Says, Cousins, Royer-Collards, Benjamin Constants and Guizots; its real military leaders sat behind the office desks, and the hog-headed Louis XVIII was its political chief. Wholly absorbed in the production of wealth and in the peaceful struggle of competition, it no longer comprehended that ghosts from the days of Rome had watched over its cradle. But unheroic as bourgeois society is, yet it had need of heroism, of sacrifice, of terror, of civil war and of national battles to bring it into being. And in the classically austere traditions of the Roman Republic its gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles and to keep their passion at the height of the great historical tragedy. Similarly,

at another stage of development, a century earlier, Cromwell and the English people had borrowed speech, passions, and illusions from the Old Testament for their bourgeois revolution. When the real aim had been achieved, when the bourgeois transformation of English society had been accomplished, Locke supplanted Habakkuk.

"The awakening of the dead in these revolutions therefore served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given tasks in imagination, not of taking flight from their solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not of making its ghost walk again."⁴

A primary example of the part played by tradition in European culture is the enormous, pervasive influence of classicism (i.e., the art of six and fifth centuries B.C. in Greece) in one form or other. So closely is classicism bound to the cultural development of Europe that a history of classicism could well be a history of the whole culture. The arts in ancient Greece set the pattern for most subsequent art in Europe. So definitive and powerful was this Greek pattern that it provided the ingredients of much art that followed. But each generation adapted the forms created by the Greeks to its own needs and recast them in the mold of its own consciousness. Greek classicism was the point of departure for artistic expression in the ancient world until the shadows settled over Roman civilization. With the paralysis of commercial intercourse and the break-up of society into small, self-contained agricultural units during the so-called "Dark Ages," near-eastern feudal Christianity dominated the minds of that age and departed from the freer, pagan classical influence. The revival of commerce, beginning in the tenth century, brought back the Aristotelian philosophy, culminating in St. Thomas Aquinas and Maimonides in the twelfth century, and several centuries later this commercial revival resulted in the transformation of the fine arts towards classicism. In every phase of consciousness there was a deliberate struggle to resume the classical tradition. Underlying this struggle was the change from the feudal to the bourgeois order, accomplished only by the conflict of forces throughout the gamut of social life. The resumption

of the classical tradition was a utilization of a form of consciousness that better supported the oncoming order and was a weapon against feudalism. Classical principles were adapted to the Renaissance mentality and discoveries and carried far beyond their ancient form in dialectical fashion (for instance, the assimilation of the study of anatomy and perspective into painting). As the bourgeois order conquered the field and continued to expand, the arts reflected the changes and modified tradition accordingly.

Seventeenth-century classicism reveals how tradition is often a misinterpretation of the past, when such misinterpretation lends itself to present purposes. "It is clear," wrote Marx, ". . . that the three unities, as the French dramatists under Louis XIV constructed them theoretically, were based on misunderstood Greek drama (and the writings of Aristotle as the leading exponent of classical Greek drama). On the other hand, it is equally clear that they understood the three unities in accordance with their own art needs."⁵ This formalistic classicism waned when the aristocracy that it was designed to support began to lose its power to the mercantile bourgeoisie.

Tradition is the over-all term for patterns transmitted from the past. The use of tradition therefore is more than the conscious revival of specific earlier patterns, but it also includes the sheer continuity of the development of the arts. The whole past is somehow engrossed in the present: it is the product of its immediate past, in which its past in turn is absorbed. Any given present is thus the product of its immediate past and it attempts to solve problems and satisfy needs emerging in the present. Full understanding of art and literature at any given moment thus requires knowledge of its dependence upon the fund of ideology upon which the artist has drawn, as well as the material conditions which set limits to this ideology. The operation of tradition in these various aspects, its derivations from the more remote past as well as the more immediate, can be seen in the creation of a complex work like Joyce's *Ulysses*. This work is the culmination of centuries of literary development and has connections with many individual features of art before the nineteenth century, as well as with contemporary literature. The dialectic of tradition

is richly illustrated in this work. Materials of past literature are abundantly recalled in it: Homer's *Odyssey*, the whole history of English prose, and many aspects of past ideologies, but all these are transformed into thoroughly contemporary material, while the whole throws into painful relief the hopelessness of bourgeois civilization. Integral to it are such elements as the Irish Renaissance, Irish politics, the development of the psychological novel in France. At the same time *Ulysses* is an unmistakable child of the literary moment. All materials, from the distant and immediate past, from politics and literature, are pressed into a contemporary mold by Joyce in his passionate seeking after a solution of the sensitive bourgeois artist's predicament. Thus an encyclopedic traditional work is at the same time a climactic contemporary expression.

Although *Ulysses* illustrates the dialectic of tradition with unusual richness, works of less gifted artists exemplify it none the less. Works of art in a given period have similarities of theme and treatment not only because they arise out of the same material and social circumstances, but also because they draw upon a common segment of tradition, and, in fact, draw upon one another, as they appear. In other words, tradition covers the use of yesterday's and even today's heritage as well as those of the past century or the last millennium. The more recent the tradition drawn upon, the less change is involved in adapting it to present uses, because of the similarity in the conditions reflected. But this breaks down in times of swift change, when a cumulative tendency finally reaches its climax and art takes a sharp turn (e.g., Cézanne). Courbet broke sharply with the classical movement in French painting, but even in this case he drew upon earlier phases in the history of painting. Courbet was prompted by the stagnation of his immediate antecedents not to continue but to renounce them. Thus the immediate past was a negative influence, but none the less determinative. In the case of Bach, on the other hand, his music represents the culmination of preceding developments and their ultimate realization.

In unstable, revolutionary periods like our own, artists are prone to extreme attitudes toward traditions. Rejection of the

past was one of the common characteristics of post-war literary movements, of which an extreme example was Futurism. The greatest exponent of Futurism in Russia was Vladimir Mayakovsky, a great poet who was revolutionary in both politics and poetry. "Erase the past from your hearts!" was his battle cry. The Futurist group he led had sprung up before the Russian revolution in violent disgust at decaying bourgeois society. In 1913 Mayakovsky delivered his *Slap in the Face of Public Taste* in which he challenged literary conventions on three counts: he opposed the literary rules which "reduce inspiration to ice"; he vowed to rejuvenate the old language, "too feeble to keep up with life's gallop"; and he turned his back on "the old great," Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, who were to be "thrown overboard from the steamship of modernity." In short, he demanded that the models and authorities of the past be swept completely away.⁶ The Futurists passed through several stages and, in 1923, they formed the L.E.F. (Left Front), believing themselves to be truly revolutionary artists. There "can be and should be no coalition whatever between the L.E.F. and the art of the past in its present day application."

The Futurists helped to reinvigorate poetic techniques, but their rejection of tradition was exaggerated. Their poetic technique still drew on the essential tradition of poetry, but their dialectical adaptation to tradition was an over-compensation for their revulsion from the old society. Their poetry was necessarily a product of social instability, and their rejection of tradition was a carry-over of anarchistic revolt against decaying bourgeois society. When their anarchistic theory of poetry began to endanger the growth of proletarian art, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union tried to correct the balance. In a resolution on literature issued on July 1, 1924, the Communist Party affirmed: "Since the party sees in proletarian writers the future leaders of Soviet literature, it must fight against all frivolous and contemptuous estimates of the cultural heritage of the past." At the same time the party was well aware that "there should be a more courageous and decisive break with genteel prejudices in literature, and all technical achievements of the old literary masters should be used in a manner that will be comprehensible to the

masses." For, at the same time that Mayakovsky and the L.E.F. were trying to "erase the past," the young Soviet government was trying to bring to the people the cultural heritage long denied them by an oppressive social regime.

Since the nineteenth century, artists have roamed restlessly among a variety of traditions, reflecting the unprecedentedly rapid shifts in social forces and structure. Probably never before in human history have men utilized such a wide range of traditions in both time and space—from revivalism of architecture to primitivism in painting; the return to the seventeenth century in Eliot and others; the return to the Middle Ages in some respects by such English composers as Ralph Vaughan Williams; the return to older scales among modernist composers generally. At the same time this period has seen the initiation of many new traditions in all the arts—numerous schools of modern painting, the styles in architecture based on newly discovered materials, radical changes in musical technique. The bewildering variety of Picasso's work is an example of the insecurity of the artist under a rapidly changing and declining capitalism. New techniques in the arts hardly establish themselves, become assimilated and applied to significant subject matter, before they are superseded by other techniques.

This lack of a settled tradition is one element of the bewilderment of the contemporary artist and the unsatisfying character of his production today. Never before, perhaps, were artists confronted with a more baffling problem of creation. The complexity of modern life, the swirl of winds of doctrine, the insecurity and disintegrating nature of social life, the rapidity with which the political and social scene changes, the imminence of great transformations of society—all these have swept away the steady and whole mentality required for the creation of a healthy art. What elements of the immediate and more remote past shall the artist integrate into his present work? What alliances shall he form with ideologies and modes of feeling of the day? These problems do not present themselves so explicitly to the artist as stated here, but they are implicit in his creative process, and the more explicit

he makes them, the more consciously can he make his choices in accord with his deepest beliefs.

Above all the serious artist must critically appraise what he wants to say. This is difficult in such arts as painting and music because the trend of the past half century has been overwhelmingly technical in the narrow sense. In these arts the search to say something significant has been abandoned in favor of a display of technical virtuosity and exploration for its own sake. A complicated set of conditions, such as the artist's remoteness from his audience, the indifference to meaningful content among the audience of bourgeois esthetes for whom he has actually been creating, and the unsettled social state and emotional tone of the day have driven the artist inward to preoccupation with technique or at best a disproportionate emphasis upon it in relation to content. This is exemplified in the graphic arts perhaps more than in any other today. Since Cézanne, the dominant tradition in painting has been the pursuit of formal values deriving from the analytical breakdown of spaces and color relations reaching its logical conclusion in "non-objective" art, and striving after pure form completely divested of content. Artists of the past did not pursue technique to the exclusion of content, because content was always taken for granted. Thus in times of technical experimentation, such as the Renaissance, experiments were always made *upon* content and not towards the elimination of content, as is the case today. The problem of the artist today is to bring content back into the creative process at the same time that he grapples with technical problems. He must try to master this problem and cease to be a passive instrument of disintegrating tendencies that reflect the atomizing effects of sick capitalism.

The Soviet Union was faced with this problem of feverish technical experiment in the years following the Revolution. New schools in all the arts flourished. This situation brought forth the following comment from Lenin: "In a society based on private property the artist produces goods for the market, he needs buyers. Our revolution has lifted the pressure of this most prosaic state of affairs from the artists. It has made the Soviet State their protector and patron. Every artist, and everybody who wishes to, can

claim the right to create freely according to his ideal, whether it turn out good or not. And so you have the ferment, the experiment, the chaos.

"But of course we are Communists. We must not put our hands in our pockets and let chaos ferment as it pleases. We must consciously try to guide this development, to form and determine its results."⁷

With relation to the problem of tradition in our time, the important element of this statement of Lenin is the principle of guidance of experimentation. Today we cannot merely stew in the ferment of experimentation without concern for the over-all objective of art, which is to give voice to the most advanced views of our day, and to accept the responsibility of contributing to the solution of our problems. Essentially this involves a conscious application of the dialectic of tradition—the adaptation of traditions to the new content that needs expression.

There is no single tradition through which our age can best be expressed. Our many-faceted culture can be approached from many technical directions. Never before has an artist had a greater variety of traditions on which to draw, yet never has he been less sure of what to say. The artist must therefore secure his grasp on the contemporary scene. Technical discipline is not enough. Today the only way the artist can recover a firm hold on his art is to have a thorough understanding of the role of the working class and the new social order that is emerging on the basis of the leadership of this class. This requires not an abandonment of the tradition built up in the years of declining capitalism, for it is in part a rebellion against the philistinism of these years. It is rather an adaptation of the viable features of this tradition to the new content that the vital artist will express. This is the most challenging problem facing the artist today.

6. *Flux of Taste*

WHAT YOU OR I or some group or stratum of society "likes," the phenomenon of taste—this is the subjective side of esthetic experience. Although this attitude is an "immediate" response to esthetic objects, it is not arbitrary or rootless. It is rather the product of an elaborate conditioning of consciousness and, like all consciousness, it is impregnated with class bias. A variety of social and personal influences, as well as training or lack of training, play their part in determining taste. "Man's nature," said Plekhanov, "makes it possible for him to have certain conceptions or tastes or inclinations, and upon his environment depends the transformation of this potentiality into reality."¹ A person's capacity to respond to art objects, which are organizations of color, line, form, surface, sound, and ideas, is shaped and modified under social pressures, and taste is the person's immediate response to these objects.

Man is not born with a specifically defined taste or sense of beauty. He possesses at birth only a potentiality for sensing—and the degree of sensitivity and discrimination varies among different individuals—which is realized under historical conditions. The sense of beauty in the concrete is therefore a historical product. Taste is the concrete form of the sense of beauty among individuals living under similar social conditions. This is an elementary fact observable from the mutations of taste in human history. In a profound passage Marx has stated the core of this socio-historical nature of the sense of beauty society develops.

"As music awakens only man's musical sense, and as the finest music has *no* meaning for an unmusical ear, is no object, since my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential

powers, thus can only be for me in so far as my essential power has a subject capacity in itself; and since the sense of an object 'o me goes only as far as *my* sense goes (having meaning only for a corresponding sense), therefore the senses of social men are quite different from those of unsocial men [that is, men before they gathered into societies—*L.H.*]. Only through the objectively unfolding richness of the human being is the richness of subjective sensuousness, such as a musical ear, an eye for the beauty of form, in short, senses capable of human enjoyment and which prove to be essentially human powers, partly developed and partly created. For not only the five senses but also the so-called intellectual and practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word *human* senses and the humanity of senses, come into being as a result of the existence of *man's* object, as a result of humanized nature.

"The formation of the five senses is the work of the entire history of the world up to now."²

Taste is not only a social product, it is also intensely personal and subjective. On the surface it appears to be an intuitive, immediately personal psycho-physiological reaction, and so there is a widespread belief that it cannot be challenged. If this is so, how can taste have more than personal significance, how can it be "universal" and subject to any kind of judgment convincing to others, in the way a scientific or mathematical assertion can be objectively proved to any reasonable person? And if taste is thus purely personal, what relevance can socio-economic conditions have to it? Franz Mehring, German Marxist scholar and biographer of Marx, once discussed this topic in an interesting way.³ He agreed that Kant correctly posed the fundamental problem of taste, so as to remove it from the realm of absolute subjectivity: how are judgments of taste possible. To translate this phrase into psychological terms, how can the human being have a recognizable pattern of pleasant or unpleasant attitudes towards the esthetic side of life? Kant tried to answer this question in a meta-physical way, but Mehring points out that the empirical answer rests with the social sciences. For historical materialism maintains that taste originates and develops in response to socio-economic conditions. Although taste in the first place is possible because men have sense-organs through which they perceive the external

world, the mere existence of sense-organs does not alone account for taste in the concrete. As Mehring says: "If an Australian Bushman and a civilized European were at the same time to hear a Beethoven symphony, or see a Raphael Madonna, the psychophysical process of perceiving would be the same in both cases, however this might be set forth in natural science, since as natural beings they are alike. What they would perceive, however, would be quite different, since as members of society, as creatures of historical circumstances, they are quite unlike."⁴

Taste therefore belongs to the realm of the social sciences, not to physiology alone, because taste is determined in practice by social conditions. For not only is taste different among people of different times and cultures, but even among those living within the same culture. For, adds Mehring, each individual is a product of the specific conditions of his unique life. Moreover, the conditions under which most people live in a given stratum of society results, within certain limits, in a taste common to individuals in that stratum. Taste is therefore not an absolutely individual and arbitrary phenomenon. It has objective grounds and therefore uniformities, in the esthetic conditioning of each *stratum* of society. Education, training in the arts and appreciation of art objects, indeed accessibility of art objects plus class standards and values, taken together, account for the uniformities of taste within a particular social stratum.

Taste can therefore be criticized and corrected through its conditions of origin. If, on the one hand, the taste of an oppressed section of the people is in some respects less sensitive because of the limited opportunities available to that group, that taste can be improved by requisite education and training. And if, on the other hand, snobbish taste prevails among the upper classes, the social roots of this snobbishness can be exposed, and the validity of the taste disputed. R. B. Perry has analyzed several types of cases in which taste can be disputed.⁵ First, taste can be challenged if it is based on an ascertainable technical mistake. For instance, if someone dismisses modern painting, it might be shown that the person simply has not understood the painting because of technical ignorance or because of a simple misunderstanding of the painter's intention. In other words, taste can be

corrected in certain cases by technical analysis. Secondly, if one's taste is based on a limited knowledge of the works in that medium, it is likely that wider acquaintance may alter one's judgments. With this possibility of disputing and correcting taste as a basis, the popular art program in the Soviet Union since the revolution has grown and broadened immensely. And, thirdly, a preference based on a certain interest (such as a class interest) may be changed if the interest changes. For instance, the revival of interest in folk music since the industrial revolution is in part due to the rejection of aristocratic prejudice against people's art.

If the state of people's preferences at a given time is determined by social conditions, as well as personal inclination, then the resultant taste should vary with these conditions. And since these conditions themselves are not uniform for a whole population, a single kind of taste is not universal at a given time. There is a widespread belief that each period has a single characteristic taste. On closer examination, however, we see that there are differences in taste which reflect differences in conditions of various and conflicting strata of society. For each social group has its own mode of taste, as L. L. Schuecking has shown.⁶ For instance, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* was intended specifically for the aristocracy. Spenser aimed in this poem, he said, "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline." On this Schuecking comments: "This, naturally, can be done only within forms that are in harmony with the other ideas of that group—a group that strives to distinguish itself from the common herd in language, style, clothing, and behavior."⁷ At this same time the folk ballad was popular among the lower classes, and Sir Philip Sidney's fondness for this folk form was not typical of the aristocracy of the day. While the English yeomen during the sixteenth century were singing and enjoying folk songs and ballads, the gentry and aristocracy were singing madrigals and other complicated art songs. In fact, the most striking demonstration of the class nature of taste is afforded by the long existence side by side of folk and sophisticated arts practiced by the laboring and ruling classes, respectively.

In primitive society, before the emergence of classes, one homogeneous taste prevailed. But with private property, divisions

began to appear in taste when the propertied class reserved certain ornaments and objects for themselves. As the gulf widened in the slave and feudal societies and in capitalism itself, peasant and folk art were almost the exclusive mediums of the laboring classes, while the sophisticated arts were available only to the ruling class. And this separation of taste can be traced directly to the differences in training and accessibility of art objects according to economic position, as well as to the class objectives of the arts themselves.

Taste thus plays its part in class struggles and can in fact be called one of its barometers. Sometimes the taste of the dominant class is an aggressive assertion of mastery, such as the explicit and rigid class limitations of the characters in tragedy and comedy during the height of absolutism. The relatively stable division of taste for long periods—the Middle Ages, for instance—between the upper and lower classes was significant of a static society in which class struggle proceeded slowly. On the other hand, in periods of rapid transition folk taste intrudes to some extent into ruling class art. Thus folk song influenced sophisticated music during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance and has exerted considerable influence upon musical development since the eighteenth century. Conversely, the taste of the waning class tends to become effete and decadent, as in the triviality and sensuality of art in the late years of the *ancien régime*. Since the consciousness of a class is sensitively registered in its taste, changes in taste reflect the need of that class. In this way the taste of the French bourgeoisie changed from sentimentalism in the middle of the eighteenth century to a valorous Roman classicism as the revolutionary demands of this class in the crisis of its struggle for power demanded something stronger.

Nor does taste reflect class interests in a unified, undifferentiated way, because there are often conflicting tendencies within a class, which also find expression in taste. Beneath the over-all movement of capitalism during the nineteenth century the developing contradictions gave rise to clashes in taste within the bourgeoisie itself. Rapid industrialization destroyed the century-old tradition of craftsmanship that went into the making of every-

day objects and taste deteriorated. The prevailing feeling was "philistinism," an unimaginative insensitivity to beauty. Where quality disappeared, its lack was compensated for by a tasteless piling up of decoration upon decoration. The sudden esthetic vacuum created by the rapid destruction of the craft tradition was quickly filled in by an emergency imitation of past styles in architecture in a series of revivalist movements. There was no time to assimilate the new techniques and adapt them to valid esthetic forms in objects of daily life; ruthless pursuit of profit in every industry swept esthetic considerations before it. There was wholesale desecration of "England's green and pleasant land," as Blake put it. Domestic architecture reached a low point. Bad taste was everywhere.

But a revolt set in within the bourgeoisie itself. John Ruskin spearheaded this revolt with his plea for a return to medieval ideals of craftsmanship. His greatest disciple, William Morris, carried on, paradoxically enough, under the banner of a vague socialism which even claimed adherence to Marx whom Morris inadequately understood. Although Morris' desire to return to the handicrafts had a reactionary medieval element, his emphasis on art for the whole people anticipated the genuine demand by the socialist movement for a people's art. Bourgeois ideologists like Matthew Arnold joined in the movement against philistinism.

Another type of violent revulsion against philistinism within the bourgeoisie resulted in the isolation of the artist from society in the art for art's sake school. Following hard on the heels of John Keats' passionate assertion that "Beauty is truth, truth, beauty," which actually subordinated truth to the beautiful, exponents of estheticism sprang up everywhere. Poe in America, the pre-Raphaelites, Algernon Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater in England; Edmond and Jules Goncourt, Gustave Flaubert, Pierre Charles Baudelaire and their followers in France, and other artistic rebels withdrew from the struggle against capitalist society itself. Although their art was anti-bourgeois in the sense that it was intended to "shock the bourgeoisie" (*épater les bourgeois*), and these men criticized bourgeois mores and mentality, but they did not on the whole challenge the social order itself. They retreated by declaring the artist's independence of the

actual world about him. And so their discontent with the esthetic standards created by industrialism was left without a channel through which to challenge this society. Theirs was an abortive revolutionary taste which turned out in practice to breed tolerance of social evil. In our own time estheticism was brilliantly expressed in Joyce's *Ulysses* before social developments brought estheticism to its reactionary conclusion in Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot and resulted in the abandonment of active progressivism in brilliant younger writers like W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood and Stephen Spender.

Thus the contradictions at each stage of capitalism are expressed in conflicting tastes.

A substantial contribution to illuminating the class nature of taste was made by an American, Thorstein Veblen. In his *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen developed the thesis that certain features of taste among the leisure classes—which are the ruling classes—are permanent and are based upon their consumption of unproductive goods and services (art works and luxuries) in order to provide conspicuous evidence of their class status. In each period the specific taste of a leisure class is determined by the prevailing mode of production because its taste had to show an obvious preference for the unproductive. Thus hunting or grazing societies developed leisure activities or objects of consumption that unmistakably suggested exemption from the productive activities by which these societies subsisted. Similarly, in capitalist society leisure class activity must not be menial or industrial. Leisure classes arose originally after a surplus had accumulated and private ownership became an established institution. Social classes became accordingly differentiated on the basis of property. The opening wedge of ownership was the enslavement of captured women.* “From the ownership of women,” said Veblen, “the concept of ownership extends itself to include products of their industry, and so there arises the ownership of things as well as of

* As Marx and Engels said: “property: the nucleus, the first form of which lies in the family, where wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first property.”*

persons.”⁹ Fundamentally, said Veblen, success is measured by “pecuniary standards,” and from this emerges “pecuniary emulation,” that is, competition in exhibiting ownership of wealth. In one form or another, according to Veblen, pecuniary emulation has played a dominant role in determining leisure class taste. There can be no doubt that Veblen hit upon an element of primary importance in the formation of taste, even if his analysis does not exhaust the whole phenomenon.

The possession of surplus wealth, Veblen continues, must be made apparent in external signs. For this the means are two, “conspicuous consumption” and “conspicuous leisure.” In the fine arts, the first is the ownership of luxury, non-productive art *objects* as far as possible beyond the reach of the laboring classes; the second is unproductive *activity*, creative or appreciative, in the arts. The essential requirement of both is that they should be remote from productive functions. Veblen has pithily described these two forms as follows: “In the one case [conspicuous leisure] it is a waste of time and effort, in the other [conspicuous consumption] it is a waste of goods. Both are methods of demonstrating the possession of wealth and the two are conventionally accepted as equivalents. The choice between them is a question of advertising expediency simply.”¹⁰ Within the leisure class itself, as the division of labor increases, differentiations appear, says Veblen, with corresponding variations in degree and kind of conspicuous consumption and leisure.

The upshot of Veblen’s argument comes in his chapter on “Pecuniary Canons of Taste,” in which he shows that standards of taste have been essentially pecuniary ever since society was stratified into classes. It is important to note that he does not deny that beauty exists apart from pecuniary canons. What he does affirm is that traditional standards are largely determined by the purchase price of the objects or services, rather than by their inherent beauty. For objects of beauty, if rare and therefore expensive, are higher in the scale of conventional taste because they are expensive. However, there does exist “a blending and confusion of the elements of expensiveness and beauty perhaps best exemplified in articles of dress and of household furniture.”¹¹ Often style in dress or furniture may please people genuinely,

but as often a beautiful object is rejected simply because it is inexpensive. And often beauty is sacrificed to pecuniary show, as Veblen noted in the architecture of his own time. It is difficult, he says, to distinguish between classicism as a taste for the archaic—namely, an expensive taste for something distinguished in its tradition and remote from contemporary life—and a genuine taste for beauty. Similarly, hand-made objects in a machine age are regarded as more beautiful than the machine-made because they bear obvious evidence of more costly workmanship. With a wealth of complication and detail Veblen shows that at any time taste is set by the owning class so as to convey unmistakable evidence of membership in that class. Other classes try to follow along as far as their pocketbooks allow.

Veblen in his analysis is in certain respects close to the Marxists. Just as Marxists hold that taste in a class society is largely based upon class motivations, so Veblen regards the “pecuniary canons” of taste as emerging with the institution of ownership. Further, the rigidity of pecuniary canons is a method of preventing anyone from forgetting the dominant position of the ruling class. In Marxian terms, these canons are part of the “superstructure.” They ordinarily serve to strengthen and perpetuate existing class relations by giving psychological emphasis to class differences. Superficially it might appear that Veblen, who studied the common characteristics of taste in *all* societies, had not taken account of the dialectical differences in taste among different class societies—the primitive, slave, feudal and capitalistic. For he often seems to be saying that taste as it first developed in primitive society has survived in all following class societies. Closer examination, however, reveals that Veblen is legitimately concerned with the general theory that taste in all “predatory”—that is, class—societies is based upon pecuniary values. Further, it is clear that survivals of taste persist from one form of society to the next, so long as the society has class distinctions and conservative agencies such as the church. Society also has its vermiform appendices, as the body does, and Marxists recognize the existence of such survivals, from one society to another, though they are of minor significance. But Veblen shows how the particular forms of

"conspicuous leisure" depend on a specific mode of production. The content of leisure class consumption and activity is in every case determined by its contrast with prevailing productive activity.

Nevertheless, Veblen differs in important respects from Marxists. He gives primacy to "pecuniary" motivations in a somewhat static way and this causes him to underemphasize the *function* of leisure class activity in the class struggle. For essentially "conspicuous consumption" and leisure are dynamically related to the effort of the ruling class to maintain itself in power by enforcing its differences with the laboring classes. Veblen has not sufficiently estimated the class function of leisure class taste in his conception of its nature.

Veblen's analysis throws light on fashion as a case of "conspicuous consumption." In a class society, upper class dress is intended not only to show that "the wearer consumes valuable goods in excess of what is required for physical comfort," but also to "make plain to all observers that the wearer is not engaged in any kind of productive labor."¹² This indicates the essentially class character of fashion in class societies. Considering the central place that fashion holds in the esthetic and social life of a people, study of it has been unduly neglected by serious students of art. The fact that fashion is a more or less ephemeral preference for personal possessions which bestow social distinction does not make it less important socially.

Basically, to be in style is to show pecuniary well being usually according to the preferences of the dominant class. Fashion is important not only in dress or furniture, but in all things which reveal the social status of people, from baby carriages to refrigerators. In recent years more and more commodities have become subject to fashion. No matter whether or not an object is beautiful, the functional is secondary to fashion, while up-to-dateness is primary. Yet these very commodities under the influence of fashion make up a large part of the esthetic experience of most people. Elements of individual, as well as class, psychology mingle in the determination of fashion. The individual who follows fashion wishes to be noticeably different from others, but at the same time he

wants to share common features with others. He wants to be ahead of the crowd, but not too far ahead. And since possession of the latest style requires money, leaders of fashion are generally found among the upper classes, so that fashion is essentially emulation of upper class taste. In class society, as the German sociologist Georg Simmel said, fashion is a "product of class distinction" and consequently "the real seat of fashion is found among the upper classes."¹³

Before mass-production civilization the ruling classes, in the persons of the monarch and his court, were the arbiters of fashion. Class distinction was so sharply marked by fashion that the shape, color, and texture of clothes were themselves marks of social position. Before the seventeenth century such distinctions were in fact fixed by sumptuary laws which dictated the materials, colors, and dimensions of clothes down to small details, in order to enforce class distinctions. For instance, in Rome sumptuary laws provided that peasants could wear only a single color, officers two colors, commanders three, and the royal household seven. The tempo of change in fashion varied with the wealth of the society. While little change occurred in the static society of sixth-century B.C. Greece, in the prosperous commercial city-states of the fifth century changes in style occurred almost annually. In the "Dark Ages" little change took place up to the twelfth century, when commerce revived. Between 1784 and 1786, for instance, Marie Antoinette led seventeen changes in hat styles; and in the court of Napoleon courtiers did not appear twice in the same costume. On the other hand, static communities saw little changes in style, as in the orient or among the peasants of Europe. And in colonial New England it was not uncommon for the same clothes to be worn for several generations.

But mass production, the rise in the standard of living that came with industrialism and the loosening of class barriers under bourgeois democracy and the growth of the middle class, and the unprecedented broadening of the consumer market, introduced radical changes in the pattern of fashion. No longer does the upper class exclusively dictate fashion. Movie stars and public idols, who symbolize luxurious upper-class living,

are exploited for this purpose by the industrial forces in control of the economy, because profit is the mainspring of our society and upper class emulation in this instance is not the means to highest profits.

The elaboration and intensity of modern fashion advertising lead the external observer to conclude that advertising largely dictates public taste in clothes. Recent researches, however, have thrown into doubt the view that advertising *creates* trends in fashion; it can only intensify *cyclical* trends. A leading authority, P. H. Nystrom, whose business it is to teach merchandising technicians how to spend their money on advertising consumers' goods most effectively, observes that "millions are wasted yearly by manufacturers and retailers who try to stem the trends of fashion in the interests of goods and styles that are not in fashion and have not a chance of becoming the fashion."¹⁴ He shows for instance, that a great deal of money was spent in a futile effort to stop the hoop skirt from going out of fashion. Conversely, he shows that some fashion trends have established themselves without any sales promotion whatever. "There seems to be very little to indicate," he says, "that any important trend of fashion has ever been changed by any form of sales promotion."¹⁵ Detailed studies of women's clothes over the last three centuries have established beyond doubt that fashions change according to certain cyclical trends.¹⁶ Various indices have been used to mark the cycles, such as length or width of skirt or depth of colletage. A. B. Young has used the contour and mass of women's skirts as an index for marking a fashion cycle. Since 1760, she says, three skirt forms have prevailed, the bustle or back-fullness, the tubular and the bell or hoop skirt. "In modern times," she writes, "the changes in prevailing fashions in women's dress have moved through a series of recurring cycles lasting for about a third of a century each; during each cycle the annual fashion changes have been variations and modifications from one central type of fashion; and finally there have been in all only three of the central types of fashion, which have succeeded one another in unchanging sequence over these past two centuries."¹⁷ Each style lasted between thirty and forty years and the full cycle of

three styles lasted from 104 to 108 years. In other words, the present tubular skirt came back into fashion at the end of the nineteenth century, about a hundred years after it had earlier come into fashion, after the tubular, hoop skirt, and bustle types had run through their cycles.

Does this scientific observation of fashion cycles throw doubt on our view that fashion, as a form of taste, reflects underlying social conditions? By no means. In the first place, the cyclical types themselves are determined by the over-all nature of the era, so that the types of dress in different civilizations vary according to the technological and ideological features of the era. Hence prevailing fashions in the orient, in Greek and Roman antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in modern times are characteristically varied. In the second place, significant changes occur *within* the cycle, in the change from one style to the next. It is by these small alterations from one style to the next that dialectical adjustment to the prevailing mode of consciousness is expressed. For instance, during the licentious Napoleonic period dresses were transparent; Victorian prudery, on the other hand, produced a multiplicity of petticoats. The emancipation following World War I was expressed in the short skirt of the flapper. All such changes occur within the limitations of the general fashion form of the cycle. Although changes within the cycle are relatively small from one style to the next, they are psychologically of extreme significance. These small changes are a product of cultural and economic influences. During World War II, for instance, conventionalized military shapes formed one style of women's hats. Nystrom cites three main influences on the character and direction of fashion: "(a) outstanding or dominating events; (b) dominating ideals which mold the thought and action of large numbers of people; and (c) dominating social groups that rule or lead and influence the rest of society."¹⁸ Consequently fashion is as stable or unstable as the society in which it appears, as illustrated by the Napoleonic period or by the period of the general crisis of capitalism since World War I. The impact of social influences is felt upon the fashion cycle not only in long-range terms, but these influences also exert their effect over short periods within

the cycle in the change from one style to another.

The changeability of fashion in the past few centuries casts into sharp relief the instability of taste itself. Instability affects not only preferences for ephemeral writers and artists, but also the pattern of feeling toward those with the most permanent reputations, like Homer, Virgil, Phidias, Shakespeare, Bach, Leonardo. For each generation interprets great artists in terms of its own needs, standards, and problems. Great art is distinguished both by its penetration into its own period and its potentiality for illuminating problems of the most varied periods and societies, and hence the taste for them persists. So with the history of the taste for Shakespeare, for instance. So intimate is the dependence of taste on social forces that a socio-economic history of Europe could be constructed from a history of the taste for Shakespeare.

A vivid example of this dependence is the growth of primitivistic taste in painting and sculpture during the past half-century.¹⁹ The basis was provided by imperialism and the growth of the world market, under which primitive art objects from the colonies were assembled in ethnological museums. By 1885 the main primitive sources for the modern movement in art were available in these museums, but they were generally considered negligible as art. Until the turn of the century ethnologists were interested in this art solely from the viewpoint of ornament, unaware of its full artistic significance. Under the impact of experimentalism in the arts, they began to revise their estimate and to recognize the artistic value of these primitive objects. At this time Gauguin turned towards primitivism as an escape from philistine industrial civilization. Later the technical experimenters were attracted by the geometrical abstraction of primitive art. Today primitive art is accepted as valid art and has deeply influenced modern painting, sculpture, and the decorative arts. The result has been a revolution in modern consciousness in art, resulting in a revolution in taste.

7. *Music and Ideology*

OF ALL THE ARTS music seems least amenable to social analysis. For separated from verbal musical text, in the sense of "absolute music," it does not directly communicate ideas. Its materials are dynamically related tones, rhythm, tempo, and tone color organized into a sound-pattern. What is the "meaning" of this sound-pattern? What does a string quartet of Beethoven, a divertimento of Mozart or a suite of Bach "mean"? Is it merely a pleasant organization of sound signifying nothing? Considered simply as an objective physical phenomenon, music is a stirring of air, sound waves. But music *as heard* is fraught with meaning for the hearer. Throughout history men have used music as their main vehicle for communicating a wide range of ideas, emotions, and feelings. When accompanying a text or ritual, as it almost always did until recent times, the function of music was to give more powerful effect to the text or ritual. In the absence of a text purely instrumental music conveys such emotions more subtly and more ambiguously. But since the communication of emotion is the ultimate function of music, we can find the social meaning, and even the class meaning, of music by concrete analysis of this highly abstract generalization.

As a means of communication music is a kind of language, and we can understand the social meaning of music by comparing it with verbal language, which is so clearly social in origin and significance. Obviously the comparison must not be pressed too closely since it is only a methodological device. Music has its alphabets in the different scales, diatonic, modal, pentatonic whole tone, and the various primitive and Oriental scales. Music has its vocabularies in the characteristic combinations of intervals

within each scale as used in various culture groups, and it even has idioms in the conventional patterns of notes (cadences, for instances) peculiar to individual composers and schools. Music has its syntax in the practice of tonal construction, polyphony and harmony. Rhythm and tempo play a more essential role in music than they do in verbal languages. If each type of music is thus a language, we must revise the popular generalization that music is the "universal language," which implies that men can understand any music without being familiar with the specific language in which it is couched. Just as a foreign language is gibberish to someone who does not know it, so music of another time or culture is incomprehensible unless a person is familiar with it. Bach is a meaningless jumble of sounds to the South Sea islander, and means little more to a contemporary occidental who has never studied it or listened to it over a period. Conversely the music of the South Seas means little more to the ordinary European or American. The occidental can hardly understand Chinese or Hindu music any better than he can understand their verbal languages.

To understand a particular music we must be familiar with its alphabet, vocabulary, and syntax. This does not, of course, require formal training, any more than a child needs to be taught his language in a formal way before he can use it, for he learns it by use and practice. Similarly, we do not need technical instruction in a foreign music before we can understand it, if we listen to it over a period and associate it with its functions in society. Or, to cite an example nearer home, most Americans could make nothing of "modern" music until they had become familiar with it by listening to it for a time. Thus there are many musics, just as there are many verbal languages. Both originate and develop under social conditions, meet social needs. As Norman Cazden has written: musical science "is a social science devoted to the properties of a musical system or language belonging to a specific culture-area and a certain stage of historical development."¹ Cazden has shown that the conventional view that consonance and dissonance originate in the physical properties of tones alone is refuted by the facts. For he demonstrates that chords or sequences of tones that are viewed as consonant in one scale or system of

music are considered dissonant in others, and vice versa; that the terms are frequently not even applicable; and that the cultural context determines consonance or dissonance.² "Thus the materials of the musical art," he writes, "are not to be discovered in natural phenomena taken in isolation, in tones and responses to them, but in the more complex systems or tonal relations which are the historical products of human culture."³

Understanding of any music then requires more than physiological conditioning, for music is a cultural expression. Yet the meaning of music, even when its vocabulary and construction have become familiar, is elusive. While verbal language is a system of symbols that refer to things, ideas and feelings, music translates feelings, emotions and ideas into sound-patterns and thereby communicates them in that form. Thus literature is directly amenable to social and class analysis, while musical content must be translated into words before it can be subjected to social analysis. It is clear, for instance, that a classical French tragedy of the seventeenth century is largely aristocratic or that *Tom Jones* is a novel of the landed gentry because of the explicit treatment of sentiments, attitudes, and characters. But how can a corresponding interpretation of the music of these periods be made? We can get a grip on the problem through the theory held by many of the greatest Greek thinkers, from Pythagoras to Aristotle, that music imitated "character" (*ethos*). They affirmed that the dynamics of music resembled the dynamics of human emotion, and that music was consequently "ethical." Melody, rhythm, tempo, and tone-color all contribute to the final "ethical" quality of music. "Rhythm and melody," wrote Aristotle, "supply imitations of anger and gentleness, and of all the qualities contrary to these, and of the other qualities of character." The movement of tones creates sound which "resembles moral character both in the rhythms and in the melodic dispositions of the high and low notes."⁴ Each one of the Greek musical modes was thought to have a specific "ethical" nature: the Dorian mode was temperate, the Phrygian mode was one of courage, the Lydian mode was melancholy, the Ionian was relaxed and indolent, and hearing each mode produced a corresponding reaction in the hearer. Although this theory is scientifically naive and hardly a rigorous

psychological account of the effect of music, it represents a view that has been widely held down to this day, namely, that music precisely expresses emotion and arouses emotion in the listener, as is obvious, for instance, in the response to martial music.

This theory, however inadequate it may be, holds the key to the cultural significance of music. But it needs to be interpreted in scientific psychological terms and demands in addition a recognition that similar emotions are expressed in specifically different ways under varying social conditions. Religious emotion, for instance, is not only differently expressed in Hindu and western music, but even at different periods within the one or the other culture. Consider the world of difference between the religious music of Palestrina, of Handel, and of Brahms. In other words, like verbal language, musical language reflects its time. Music does not transcend the culture in which it is created any more or less than literature or painting. The emotions and attitudes expressed in music are a product of the society which gave it birth.

This is not so difficult to grasp when we remember that the same emotions in literature also vary with their times. The emotion of love in literature has varied with changing attitudes towards women and their place in society. There is a difference in the precise character of love in primitive man, in classical man, the cavalier, the bourgeois, romantic, or the disillusioned twentieth century man. The expression of love in music too, undergoes similar changes, as is evident from the sixteenth century madrigal, the eighteenth century aria, the nineteenth century *Lied* or the contemporary song. These alterations can be traced to underlying social conditions.

Furthermore, music has a "national" or regional character like any other art. The old Greek modes were named after the places of their presumed origin, and the *ethos* of each mode was supposed to represent the dominant ethical character of each place. It is an obvious fact of musical history that each society or people has created a music distinguishable from others. The causes for these local differences can only lie in the conditions of their creation. Within each music there are also class differences, the most obvious being those between a people's folk music and art music. Also, there were times, such as the Middle Ages, when

learned musical styles were "international" (*i.e.*, inter-European and near-Eastern) just as Latin was the international church language of the time, and this too can be explained by well known historical conditions.

From these related facts about music, that it is a social phenomenon like verbal language and expresses the group of emotions peculiar to its time and place, we are led to the conclusion that the content of music is ideological. Like literature, painting, sculpture, philosophy, law, and every other "spiritual" phase of man's activity, the music of any society reflects socio-economic relations. This conclusion opens up a host of problems, only a few of which are discussed here, since our intention is limited to broaching the subject from the viewpoint of historical materialism. A full treatment of the question would demand an examination of the social, political, religious, and personal, as well as technical influences that determine musical creation. We cite a few broad examples. In the period from about 1400 to 1600, when the Netherlands was a great economic and political power, its musical expression was also dominant. Speaking in the broadest terms, Netherlands choral music set the style for all Europe in music during these two centuries. Just as the Reformation was the turning point of modern history and ushered in the period of nationalism, so the change from polyphony to harmony, which takes place over several centuries, was initiated in part because of the broadening of the audience for cultivated music. When Luther introduced congregational singing, the intricate polyphony of the Mass had to be simplified. But this kind of singing arose from the need for greater participation of the people in religious ceremony and reflected the shift in power from the limited aristocracy and church hierarchy to the more numerous and less refined bourgeoisie. The growing individualism and restlessness of this period had its effect even on church music itself, which after an accumulation of technical changes over several centuries, became impossibly florid and complex, and made use of profane texts and popular melodies. As one means of defending the Church from these disintegrating influences, the Papacy issued decrees, such as those of the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century, simplifying music and forbidding secular influences.

The Church reimposed discipline on its composers and performers so that the doctrinal text would stand out from the music.

The history of styles in music is just as much a product of social development as in the other arts. Technical potentialities of music set the limits of development at any time, but technical development is itself controlled by external socio-economic pressures. The most famous name in music of the first ten centuries of our era is that of a Pope. In the seventh century Pope Gregory organized existing music into a liturgical system and prescribed strict limitations on Church music—the dominant form of art music of the period—to keep music from furthering heresy and to sustain the authoritarian, static social order. Some centuries later, when conflicts arose within feudalism itself and its hold loosened as trade revived and towns grew, music began more and more to overflow its Gregorian limits. Experiments in counterpoint became more frequent, the austerity of plainsong was relaxed in favor of elaboration and embellishment. Vigorous folk song began to encroach upon Church music and to renew it. The clergy were periodically alarmed at this undermining influence upon their static authoritarianism and issued edict after edict to control this free and often elaborate development, but without success. The gradual loss of rigidity in feudalism and in music at the same time shows clearly that a connection exists between the structure of society and its musical expression. It shows that music is part of class struggle at the level of a period's emotional development. For the Church used music as an instrument for reinforcing in emotional terms the subjection of the people to the static social order. The secularization of life during the Renaissance was accompanied by the flowering of new secular forms such as the opera. Under the influence of bourgeois expansion and freedom the various "abstract" forms such as the symphony developed.

Another indication of the ideological character of music is the close relation of the principles and temper of music to all the arts and manners in the same period. The austerity of plainsong corresponds in this respect to medieval painting and the suppression of individualism. Formalism characterized not only the music, but also the painting, sculpture, and literature, as well as the aristocratic manners of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The sophisticated arts were strictly an upper class expression during this period, as is clearly evident from the refinement of popular dance tunes into the aristocratic movements of the classical suite. When the romantic temper conquered literature in the nineteenth century, a corresponding change took place in music under the titanic influence of Beethoven. The abundant technical experimentation in music during the past forty years has its counterpart in painting, poetry, and the novel. For music states in more immediately emotional terms what the other arts say in graphic forms and concepts.

To a great extent the ideological significance of music has been determined by its social functions, which have been various and important. In primitive society music was an essential part of ritual, which had a central role in the survival of the tribe. One of the first, if not the earliest, functions of music was in the work song to ease labor, a use which has continued into our own time and still exists in many parts of the world. From the dawn of society music has been the accompaniment of dance. In one form or another religion has found music indispensable. Song has played an important part as a rallying call for social movements, for example, such songs as *Ça Ira*, the *Marseillaise*, and the *Internationale*. In seventeenth-century England the anti-papist ballad *Lilliburlero* played a part in precipitating the Revolution of 1688. Music was used to entertain the court and the folk and, in recent centuries, the bourgeoisie and laboring classes. For instance, in opera, the theater, and latterly in the movies, music has been an adjunct to the expression of aristocratic, bourgeois, and working class cultural ideas. Throughout history the social meaning of music arose out of its social function. But the relation between the emotional cast of the music and its function was not arbitrary, for emotional attitudes aroused by the music were expressive of its social function. Only in this way can we account for changes in the emotional quality of music throughout its history.

This emotional quality is not above classes, but has a class character. One way of determining the class character of a specific piece of music is through its functions, since this function is associated with activities peculiar to a class. In a classless society

such as the most primitive tribes, the music is itself classless, since it gives emotional expression to the integrated activities of the whole group. But in class societies, the situation is different. Work songs express laboring class attitudes. Religious music strengthens the class function of religion. During the Middle Ages song was sharply divided into two types—for the ruling nobles and for the common people; each differed from the other according to its social use and the psychological make-up of its class.

In our own time music is also sharply divided into two groups, popular and sophisticated, each of which in its special way provides psychological reinforcement of bourgeois values and attitudes. The sophisticated tends to be experimental with an aridity or thinness of emotional content, and is on the whole lacking in vitality. For the composer has lost his anchorage in the masses of men, in their lives and interests, and reflects rather the hopelessness and disillusionment of the sensitive bourgeois. Those who would interpret contemporary sophisticated music wholly in technical terms, fail to comprehend that the musician is a total human being and composes out of his totality of outlook. In this era of monopoly capitalism, the bourgeois viewpoint is bankrupt. The maladjustment of the bourgeois composer's relation to society is reflected in his music. The highly sensitive composer refuses to accept the philistine bourgeois values steeped in a money psychology, and instead surrenders to disintegrating influences. Those composers who have embraced progressive values find the expression of these values a problem of great subtlety which they have not yet solved. Even composers in the Soviet Union have not yet achieved a solution of these problems. But a great part of contemporary bourgeois music reflects the rootlessness, pessimism and barrenness in the outlook of fine sensibilities in our society. This is the meaning of decadence in contemporary music. The result is a negation of vital emotional content.

The second grand division of contemporary music, the popular, is a more direct, deliberate manipulation by the the movies, radio, phonograph, and sheet music enterprises—all of which are monopoly businesses in our time—toward a content that deflects the masses from a realistic understanding of their problems. While

the text of these musical expressions is rigidly restricted to sentimental love or eccentric, trick ideas (called "novelties"), the music itself is similarly standardized to a dead uniformity of sentimentality. The popular music market is "free" in the sense that the public can accept or reject what the musical entrepreneur offers, but the monopolist of the music industry controls this process by drastic limitation on what he offers. Social protest is taboo in popular music; instead we get a sentimental reaffirmation of bourgeois ideas and standards. Thus the monopolistic owner of the mass music media achieves a dual interrelated purpose: he imposes on the mass audience an inferior, sentimentalized product which sells in large quantities by virtue of its escapist quality, and he diverts the emotional life of the masses from a serious, realistic approach to their problems and hence helps to prop declining capitalism. Thus the connection between popular music and its ideological function is close.

Prior to the capitalist era music almost always went with a text, which gave an explicit clue to its class meaning. But neither music alone nor text alone was the vehicle of this meaning, for both formed an integrated whole in which the music enforced the meaning of the text. Yet the music alone can bear the whole meaning, as we know from the elaborate development of instrumental music. Secularization of life and the opening of the scientific era during the Renaissance resulted in the separation of instrumental music from the voice. The weakening of Church dominance, as well as the gradual acceptance of the physical, naturalistic point of view, were the conditions for the use of instruments independently of text and the creation of instrumental theory. Capitalism was getting under way, with its growth of mechanics and acoustics, and with it the formation of modern patterns of life. In a recent book, *English Chamber Music*, Ernst H. Meyer traces the development of the use of instruments through the Middle Ages and he shows that the common people were the bearers of an instrumental tradition which was to flower with the conquest by the young bourgeoisie over the aristocracy and its church ally. The Catholic Church opposed the use of instruments during the Middle Ages as subversive of its authority.

"Instrumental music," writes Meyer, "was the cheerful accompaniment of the growth of the new burgher class."⁵ On the whole the story of the growth of instrumental music parallels the rise to power of this young bourgeoisie, which defied the Church objections to the secular influence of instruments.

"During the 14th century," says Meyer, "especially during its latter half, instrumental minstrels and other itinerant musicians sometimes became a real menace to the authority of Church and State. Now the true nature of medieval instrumental music as part of the struggle of the lower classes for individual freedom and secular gaiety begins to be obvious."⁶ And instrumental music gained currency and grew with the ascendancy to power of the bourgeoisie. The spirit of this music reflected the new revolutionary mentality which was responsible for instrumental development. By the eighteenth century instrumental music occupied musicians more than ever before in the west.

The elements that enter into the determination of instrumental style are also those which condition the total consciousness of the age and thus endow music with class content. As Paul Bekker says of this development, "*Our own music*" begins in the eighteenth century because this music "enters the realm of experience to which our own time belongs."⁷

The source of the composer's livelihood is also an important factor determining ideology of the music he produces. Until the nineteenth century, composers lived on patronage from the Church or the nobility and consequently composed according to the class requirements of their patrons. This does not by any means imply that composers were forced to compose music in a manner uncongenial to them. But the patronage system set the styles according to the need of the class the composer served. The emotional pattern of music conformed with that class, which comprised the audience which the composer applied himself to reach. When the troubadors, who were servants of the feudal nobility, used folk material, they modified it and served it up in a more refined, elegant form for their employers. The psychology of styles thus differed according to the classes whose purposes they expressed. Joseph Haydn's symphonic style changed with his

audience, from the intimate, charming pieces composed for the court of his patron, Prince Esterházy, to the later brilliant symphonies for his London audience. By Beethoven's time the concert audience had grown, breaking the bounds of court performance, and brought the composer the possibility of living on musical publication and performance before this paying audience. Although down to our own day the composer has never been completely freed from reliance on a patron he has been liberated from absolute dictation by the new open market for music. This required the approbation of the public. The technical changes from the Haydn to the Beethoven symphonies arose from the growth in audience and the change in ideology that society as a whole had undergone.

Hence the emotional quality of music is tied to its society and audience. This quality is not generalized but is specifically shaped by social conditions, just as prose styles and the meanings of words change with the times. In modern times the preservation of music of the past, complete with name of composer and date of composition, has given us historical perspective in all the music we hear. Modern listeners can therefore recapture the emotional qualities of other times, in addition to that of the functioning music of their own period. In pre-printing, pre-notational days the music of previous generations was preserved by oral tradition, which was modified by current usage and became, to all intents, a contemporary music. In recent centuries, however, the western repertory has included an elaborate variety of historical styles with varying class content. For the essential quality of music of the past that makes it perennially interesting is the depth with which it communicates the feelings of its time in terms of its mastery of available technique. Such music has "universal" values because it most adequately expresses ideologies of its time in emotional terms. The recognition of class character in music, as in all art, does not restrict its interest or value for later generations, but on the contrary enhances and deepens our understanding of the music itself and of the mode of life it reflects.

8. *Art and Social Action*

THE CREATION OF ART is a social act: it is the act of communicating ideas and emotions by the artist to other men through a specific art medium. The fact that a work of art is an object of pleasure among men was observed in the earliest writings of the Greeks, when Homer wrote of the "bard who would delight them all."¹ But from the earliest days thinkers have debated whether delight is or should be the only function of art. Many, if not most writers, believed that art primarily serves some useful function in society. One of the earliest protagonists of the "delight" theory was Alcidas, a contemporary of Socrates. Alcidas said of rhetorical speeches that "we should reasonably have the same attitude toward them as toward statues of bronze and images of stone and painted portraits. For these are imitations of real bodies and when looked at are a source of delight, but are without utility in the life of men."² And Aristotle once wrote: "The products of the arts have their goodness in themselves,"³ that is, do not depend on any utility for the interest they arouse. Even St. Augustine made a distinction between the beautiful and the useful: "I define as fair, what is so absolutely of itself; and fit which becomes graceful when applied to some other thing."⁴ Similar views were expressed before the eighteenth century.

From the Renaissance onward literary critics argued whether the function of poetry was to "delight" or to "instruct." But not until the eighteenth century did philosophers, culminating in Immanuel Kant, really systematize the view that beauty was its own excuse for being and independent of any use. This philosophical theory found its way into concrete artistic activity under the guise of "art for art's sake," a theory that has won many

adherents among the finest artists and writers of Europe since the early nineteenth century. But at the same time this view was also opposed by others with a more developed social consciousness who were closer to the actual functioning of art in the life of men.

As to the *facts* about the place of art in society there can be no debate. From the most primitive to the most specialized, sophisticated order of society art has served numerous religious, political, and social functions and was so intended by its creators. We have seen how closely primitive art was related to the preservation of life itself and in what different ways art has expressed and supported the class structure of society. The immediately functional relation of art to practical life makes it extremely hard for most people even to grasp the idea, let alone agree with it, that the esthetic attitude is the contemplation of a beautiful object for its own sake. And certainly this theory was alien to the motivation and expressed opinions of many of the greatest artists and thinkers. For Aristotle the aim of tragedy was social, the purging of the emotions of Greek citizens (though this is not strictly consistent with his view cited above). The whole of Christian art was devoted to the greater glory of God. The drama was for centuries regarded as "the school of the people." Milton wrote his *Paradise Lost* to "show the ways of God to man." Throughout history the motives for creating art, and the uses to which it was put, extended beyond pure enjoyment, although this too undoubtedly played a large part. But for whole eras the idea of separating contemplation of art from its social uses would have been simply unintelligible.

The inability of men in this or any age to grasp the idea of art for art's sake does not of itself invalidate the idea. For the history of thought is a progressive correction of misconceptions and progress into new knowledge. Just as men finally overcame the error of regarding the world as flat, so our understanding of the esthetic experience may be subjected to radical criticism and revision. What is decisive is to know the facts, to understand the way art actually operates in the life of men. And we have been trying to show that, as a matter of fact, art cannot be separated from social forces in origin, in effect, and in its very nature. In other words, there is a reciprocal relation between art and society. "Political,

juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development," wrote Engels, "is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic base."⁵ Art has operated as a social force because it contributes to the shaping of consciousness and has thus played a part in moving men to social action.

The art for art's sake advocates deliberately and on principle severed art from social action. They asserted that any attempt to give art a social meaning or to put art to social use was a perversion of beauty, an attempt to break the butterfly on the wheel. "They are the elect," wrote Oscar Wilde, "to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty."⁶ The artist, they asserted, was above and beyond society and had a single aim in life and a single responsibility, the creation of beauty. This beauty was its own excuse for being, absolutely independent of any consideration outside itself. The implications and effects of art were in the most absolute sense considered irrelevant. Use and beauty they regarded as not only incompatible, but any attempt to relate them was a cardinal sin against art.

This attitude emerged when the industrial revolution was becoming the all-embracing influence upon society. The dominant bourgeois consciousness of the time was unimaginative, petty, prosaic, "philistine," and hostile to art. The sensitive artist could not create in harmony with such a consciousness, and so he withdrew from the actualities about him. He renounced the bourgeois standards of morality and success and lived in dedication to his art alone. But his rebellion against the bourgeoisie did not extend to the political and economic structure of society. On the contrary, artists of Flaubert's generation tended to adopt reactionary, aristocratic social views. They were opposed to progressive movements of the time and to democracy and socialism because they believed these social institutions corrupted taste. Flaubert even opposed universal suffrage, calling it a "disgrace to the human mind." He stated his credo thus: "The main thing is to hold one's soul in a high region far above the bourgeois and democratic mires. The cult of art gives one pride; one can never have too much of it. Such is my ethics."⁷ In practice then, the

art for art's sake men were no direct threat to the bourgeois order. They did not understand that so long as they accepted bourgeois social relations, they must inevitably suffer from the consciousness which these relations created. Plekhanov has thus analyzed the predicament of the art for art's sakers: "The tendency of artists and those concerned with art to adopt an attitude of art for art's sake arises when a hopeless contradiction exists between them and their social environment."⁸

Those who accept the art for art's sake view in any form are thus setting up as the standard of esthetic life the artist's withdrawal from social movements. But this is no solution to the esthetic problem: it is an evasion. For a healthy art exists only when the artist is rooted in a functioning society and creates out of its common consciousness. The art for art's sake men were thus passively enclosed within their own predicament. They did not take part in movements to change society so that it would be more favorable to their creation, but on the contrary suffered distortions in their mentality because of their unnatural situation. Contrast, for instance, the *Odyssey* of Homer with its attempted modern counterpart, Joyce's *Ulysses*. The first expresses the collective thought and feelings of a society with which the author is in complete harmony. The second is a product of the tortured consciousness of one of the greatest of writers who is imprisoned within the contradiction of his personal quest for beauty with a society which frustrates this desire. The artist can resolve this contradiction only by rooting himself in the most vital part of his society and expressing its collective aspirations. For it is a seeming paradox that the *personal* quest for beauty can succeed only when the artist identifies himself with a progressive social class, like the working class.

It was a futile gesture for the art for art's sakers to disclaim responsibility for the effects of their art. Such effects were inevitable. The artist's work was vitally affected by his conscious divorce from society. The basic mistake of the esthete is to suppose that the artist can live as a departmentalized human being. The conscious effort to liberate themselves from philistine bourgeois society by cutting themselves off from society altogether generated in the French esthetes a social consciousness

which, as Christopher Caudwell said, "is torn from social action like flesh from bone."

For art is essentially a means of communication among men through which life and consciousness are enlarged. It is inexorably social both in its foundation and effects, and its final objective is the expression of human values. Art is thus concerned with human values in the sense in which science is not; for while science strives to be as objective as possible to exclude all elements of human feeling, art concerns itself primarily with the expression of this very feeling. No matter what subject matter the artist treats, his central concern is its relation to feelings and attitudes, and his treatment is pervaded by his own system of values. In effect, a work of art tries to get its audience to agree with the artist's interpretation of life. This is true not only of works with a strong and explicit intention, such as those of the Greek dramatists, of Milton or Ibsen, but also of modern works with a developed esthetic of "objectivity" like Flaubert, Joyce, or T. S. Eliot. For the artist has no control over his work and its influence once it has become public property. Consequently his art makes a difference to social development, no matter what theory the artist may hold. Since art presents human values, men cannot on the whole remain indifferent to it. Art is thus a form of persuasion and hence takes its place among social forces, because it has the power to modify consciousness and to influence beliefs, and these are the basis for action. The persuasive effect of art is gained to the extent to which the audience responds positively to its values or is compelled to accept the feelings, ideas, and characters it portrays. The work of art tends to arouse its audience to active acceptance or rejection. In any case, the audience assimilates the vicarious experience conveyed by the work, which then modifies consciousness and existing attitudes.

Works of art vary enormously in their power to change the attitudes and ideas of the audience. Some works have an immediate impact and may contribute significantly to social change. Only infrequently do single works of art specifically influence events by heightening the conscious will to change and adding

to the emotional drive behind change. Song has been a powerful ally of many revolutionary movements. *John Brown's Body* helped rally the people to the anti-slavery cause and many splendid songs helped to buoy the spirits of the Loyalists during the Spanish civil war. Literary works have played important political roles. John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, for instance, was such a telling satire on Robert Walpole and his clique that the sequel was banned. Such works are literally springs of action for they directly influence the social activity of their audience by expressing openly and explicitly ideas hitherto vaguely felt. Thus *Don Quixote* not only revolutionized the novel but was also an important element in transforming the contemporary outlook from medieval to modern, from feudal to bourgeois. *Robinson Crusoe* helped to crystallize bourgeois consciousness in the eighteenth century. In our own time *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* helped to focus attention of intellectuals on the decadence of the bourgeois mentality and formed a prelude to the leftward trend of artists and intellectuals in the thirties.

While certain works of this sort do have a specific social effect, the bulk of art has a more general effect and contributes to a given trend in consciousness. Most art feeds a variety of audience interests not immediately related to social issues or social action. Men are attracted to art by its personal recreational value, its technical features, or its subject matter. Although such art does not exert a direct social influence, it nevertheless helps to form the consciousness of men. Unconsciously or not, it conveys a class attitude, as inevitable in class society as gravitational pull is upon physical objects. Those who deny the pervasiveness of class values in art do so because they take them for granted. For class values can be perceived as such only if class consciousness is explicit. The art works at any specific time are usually clustered about the class interests which they support. In general, art exerts a cumulative influence to confirm a class attitude or to shake its hold. In this way it takes its place in the pattern of social forces and contributes to change to the extent that it coincides with lines of social tension. As a whole, art thus influences social movement, while the power of any single work varies greatly.

A psychological basis for the understanding of the connection of art with social action is found in Tolstoy's "infection" theory of art. For fifteen years the great novelist studied the whole history of esthetics, but finally based his own "infection" theory on the views of his French contemporaries, Véron and Guyau. These writers advanced the theory that art was based on sympathetic feelings among men. Art itself is a communication of feelings and emotions, they said. The artist therefore creates an object which arouses in other men the feelings and emotions he intended to convey. "The object of art," wrote M. Guyau, "is to imitate life in order to make us sympathize with other living beings and thus to produce an emotion of a social character. . . . [Art is] entirely based on the laws of sympathy and the transmission of emotions."⁹ The aim of art is thus to achieve social solidarity by promoting community of feeling. Tolstoy followed this theory in important respects. The relationship between the artist's creation and the person appreciating his work is one of "infection" with feelings. In Tolstoy's words: "To evoke in oneself a feeling one has experienced and having evoked it in oneself then by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling—that is the activity of art. Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man, consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them."¹⁰

This infectious power of art constitutes its social force, for feelings are the basis of action, and art socializes feelings. The precise social function of art is then to draw people into a given direction of social movement. Art, continued Tolstoy, "is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards the well-being of individuals and of humanity."¹¹ Art's emotional power to cement social unity makes social groups strong and more cohesive. Thus far we may agree with Tolstoy. But when he proceeds to limit art arbitrarily to the transmission of religious feelings, the logic of his position breaks down. For the psychological basis of communication is the same no

matter what kind of feelings are transmitted, whether they be religious or secular or pagan. A work is no less artistic because it "infects" with non-religious feelings. We must also amend Tolstoy's theory and add that the artist also "infects" his audience with ideas as well as feelings. Hence we may accept the "infection" theory without being committed to its religious and obscurantist complications.

The Russian revolutionists, who were steeped in Tolstoy, followed his infection theory pretty closely. Lenin once said in a conversation with Clara Zetkin: "Art must unite the feeling, thought, and will of the people, uplift them." The art of a revolutionary period functions to reveal the forces at work in the class struggle, to infect the revolutionary class with a driving feeling toward emancipation, and to strengthen its sense of solidarity. Plekhanov, too, shared the Tolstoyan view, it would appear. "Art," Plekhanov once said, "is a means of drawing people together. It is also a means of raising them against each other."* By the same token it separates people more decisively into opposing groups by helping each group to close its ranks. "Literature," said Plekhanov, "must necessarily influence, by rousing their consciousness, all those who are crushed by the existing order. . . . When art expresses the tendencies of a rising, and therefore revolutionary, class, it constitutes an important instrument of progress." We now stand in a climactic period in the rise of the working class and revolutionary artists are faced with the problem of creating works that will help unite that class in its struggle.

Tolstoy maintained that a work was not art if it lacked infectious power, if it failed to communicate the feelings and emotions intended by the artist. He was getting at the truth of the esthetic experience when he wrote: "If a man is infected with the author's condition of soul, if he feels this emotion and this union with others, then the object which has effected

*Tolstoy also recognized this divisive function of art in terms close to those of Plekhanov. "Non-Christian art," said Tolstoy, "while uniting some people, makes that very union a cause of separation between these united people and others; so that union of this kind is often a source, not merely of division but even of enmity towards others."¹²

this is art; but if there be no such infection, if there be not this union with the author and with others who are moved by the same work—then it is not art.”¹³ And here is the key to the problem of “propaganda” in art. Art influences social action by its direct impact upon consciousness through the emotions and ideas. In a propagandistic work, on the contrary, the propagandist does not infect his audience directly, but states ideas which arouse his audience emotionally. The artist roots his message in a genuinely depicted human situation; the propagandist constructs a synthetic situation around the matrix of ideas he wishes to propagate. This crucial problem of the progressive artist is not new: it appeared with the birth of modern art. One of the first Communist poets, Ferdinand Freiligrath, published a volume of verse, *Ça Ira*, in 1846 under Marx’s influence. But he could not sustain his Communist effort in poetry and justified his failure to solve this crucial problem with the familiar assertion that party adherence is a “cage,” and that the poet can create only when he is “above parties.” Marx and Engels had a lively awareness of the problem, and warned against inartistic “propaganda.” They had unusual esthetic sensibility and continually criticized writers who failed to realize artistically their social intention in their work. When Ferdinand Lassalle submitted his play *Sickingen* for their criticism, they pointed out this esthetic lack. “You would have to Shakespearize more,” Marx wrote to Lassalle, “while at present I consider Schillerism, making individuals the mere mouthpieces of the spirit of the times, your main fault.”¹⁴ Marx complained that Lassalle had drawn his characters “too abstractly.”¹⁵ At another time Engels emphasized this point to Lassalle: “Your *Sickingen* is entirely on the right road, the principal characters in fact are representatives of definite classes and tendencies and hence definite ideas of their time, and the motives of their actions are to be found not in trivial individual desires but in the historical stream upon which they are being carried. However, the progress still to be made is in making these motives more lively, active, so to say, spontaneously occupying the foreground more through the course of the action itself. . . .”¹⁶

In other words, Marx and Engels were affirming the basic principle that art must be a representation of life as it is actually lived, and not an artificial construction in which the characters are mouthpieces of ideas. In Engels' famous letter to Minna Kautsky about her working class novel, he defines his attitude towards "tendentious," or as we should say today, propaganda art. "I am not at all an opponent of tendentious [*Tendenz*] poetry as such. The father of tragedy, Aeschylus, and the father of comedy, Aristophanes, were both clearly tendentious poets, just as were Dante and Cervantes. . . . But I think that the bias should flow by itself from the situation and action, without particular indications, and that the writer is not obliged to obtrude on the reader the future historical solutions of the social conflicts pictured."¹⁷ Political and social movements and ideas, since they are among the most important of human activities, assuredly belong in art, but they must be given a genuinely human context. When they occur in a work of art, they must be represented as the expression of real human beings in authentic social situations. Only then will social art be convincing and in the long run have the deepest influence on consciousness and social action. Serious obstacles confront the progressive artist in the creation of full-bodied art. His passionate conviction may disturb artistic equilibrium in his eagerness to present new ideas; he is breaking new ground, using an approach which has not yet been fully worked out in practice; his roots in class society obscure his vision of motives because his own consciousness is not entirely free from bourgeois illusions; and unresolved tensions of class struggle are reflected in incomplete artistic integration. Ultimately the basic problem of the contemporary progressive artist is to achieve within himself an integration with the working class in the midst of a rapidly disintegrating society, together with technical mastery of his medium.

Signs of disintegration and decadence are only too abundant among bourgeois artists today. Many of the most sensitive and talented among them are turning to one or another reactionary view of life and saturating their creation with reactionary ideology. For all their exquisite art and talent, they are in

fact propagandists for reaction. The vogue for existentialism, with its anti-progressive philosophy of absolute, metaphysical personal freedom, its obscurantist view of history and science, has claimed many from Jean Paul Sartre to a number of immature young intellectuals. In *The Iceman Cometh*, Eugene O'Neill propagates the view that the only alternative to death is deliberate self-delusion. Tennessee Williams, one of the most promising dramatic talents of the past few decades, spends his talent on presenting characters on the margin of sanity, declaiming that no hope remains in the world beyond psycho-analytic therapy. Poets like T. S. Eliot or Robert Lowell take refuge in some form of Catholicism, while writers like Aldous Huxley, W. H. Auden, or Christopher Isherwood, turn their backs on the modern mind by embracing Vedanta or Yogi. These artists are widening the gap between their readers and progressive ideology.

While the effects of this highly sophisticated art are subtle, they influence social attitudes and consequently social action—often by promoting social inaction. The content of mass arts is intended to bind the masses more tightly to the bourgeois order by the ubiquitous imposition of its values upon the mass audience. The mass arts afford the people a vicarious experience of comfortable and glamorized bourgeois existence. This sort of escape to a never-never land of ginger-bread bourgeois relations fills the leisure time of the working class and petty bourgeoisie in the film, radio, comics and in all mass media. What the monopolists of these mass arts try to palm off as “pure entertainment” is actually a form of narcosis which induces delusions of the acceptability of capitalism.

A brilliant observation on the problem of propaganda in art was made by the important Marxist critic, G. Lukacz.¹⁸ He maintained that propagandist art was really idealistic because it does not exhibit and bring to consciousness an objective social current, but rather makes a *demand* on reality. Just as utopian socialism is idealistic because it attempts to change society by means of ideas alone, instead of promoting action along lines of objective social movement, so propagandist art remakes reality

in terms of the artist's wish. The propagandist has failed to *create* an objective picture. "Tendentiousness" is a subjective demand out of line with the direction of social movement and the nature of human character. With this Lukacz contrasts what he calls "partisanship," the conscious espousal of realistic social movement. The objective artist "makes no 'external' demands upon his re-creation of reality," says Lukacz, "for—if he is to mirror reality correctly, that is, dialectically—his re-creation of it must itself contain the fate of those demands (which arise really and concretely out of class struggle) as integrating factors of objective reality, as arising out of it and reacting upon it. . . . He does not need to distort, rearrange or 'tendentiously' color reality, for his portrayal—if it is a correct, dialectical one—is found upon the perception of those tendencies (in the justified Marxian sense of the term) that make themselves felt in the objective solution."¹⁹ Propagandist art fails to capture the objective realities and their effect on human character but is an expression of wishful thinking in which human situations are created around these subjective demands upon reality. And the result is bad art because the artist has, firstly, misconceived his intention and because the audience has, secondly, been confusedly "infected" with these synthetic ideas and feelings.

The "infection" of the audience is thus a primary aim of the artist. This is one phase of the operation of art as ideology. For art not only originates in the material conditions of society in which the artist lives. It also affects the movement of that society by modifying prevailing consciousness through "infecting" the audience with new ideas and emotions. Propagandist art fails to achieve this objective. Nevertheless one must guard against too facile a criticism of "propagandist" art. For the most profound artistic problem of our time is the ordering of the vital forces acting under our eyes, and this requires technical mastery of contemporary materials and a deep grasp of social forces. Some floundering and false starts should be expected, and among these are the proletarian works of the vigorous literary and artistic movement of the 'thirties. These works pointed the direction of a truly modern revolutionary art but

did not achieve it. Constructive criticism demands a recognition of the direction and a search for the right path. Artistic mastery in our time presupposes a grasp of large social tendencies and a selection of those forms in our fluid and restless day that will adequately express them. Concretely, this requires a grasp of the role of the working class and its relationship to other classes. New and revolutionary artistic techniques, such as recent movements in painting, must be assimilated into social art and given significance beyond the purely formal. The task constitutes an obligatory challenge to the contemporary artist. For it is increasingly evident that the artistic problem of our age is experimentation with proletarian art.

Corrupting commercialism, which tempts contemporary artists more than ever before in history, is certainly not conducive to the achievement of this goal. A more subtle obstacle is the prevalent tendency of writers to regard themselves as "literary supermen," as Lenin expressed it. He was fully aware of the pitfalls that lie in wait for an art which allies itself with the proletariat. "There can be no doubt," he wrote, "that literature is the last thing to lend itself to mechanical equalization, to leveling, to domination of the majority over the minority. There can be no doubt that in this field it is absolutely necessary that the widest latitude be assured to personal initiative and individual inclinations, to thought and imagination, to form and content. All this is beyond dispute, but all this proves only that the literary aspect of the work of a proletarian party cannot be identified in a stereotyped manner with the other aspects of its work." But Lenin immediately adds that "All this does not in the least dispute the principle—so strange and curious to the bourgeoisie and bourgeois democracy—that literature must necessarily and inevitably become an inextricable part of the work"²⁰ of the working class party. Art willy-nilly influences society and the Marxist artist advocates that this influence shall be wielded in full consciousness of his intentions, instead of allowing himself to be the puppet of forces bearing upon him from all sides and molding his work to ends alien to his aims.

9. *Folk Art*

WHAT IS MEANT by calling folk art the "art of the people?" The answer is not simple, for the subject is clogged with conjecture, controversy, and gaps in information. Indubitably folk art has always included laboring people as the major part of its audience. Yet other radically different types of art also have had such an audience: this is true of primitive art as well as popular and mass-produced art under capitalism. As we shall see, folk art differs in essential respects from these other types of art for the people. The scope of folk art is extremely broad, including the entire craft and creative activity of the people; anything made by the folk can be viewed as art. This aspect of folk production is seen in isolation in museums, where furniture, textiles, and other useful objects made by the folk are exhibited. Here we shall limit ourselves to an analysis of folk song and ballad, from which we can arrive at the nature of folk art in general.

The nature of popular art will be considered extensively later, but we shall at this point indicate the essential distinction of folk from primitive art. Primitive society is homogeneous, closely integrated, with a low degree of the division of labor. There is little discrepancy between personal desires and needs in the primitive community. Primitive art, no less than any other primitive activity, was oriented toward the survival of the tribe. This art was therefore "collective" in the sense that it expressed the needs, aspirations, and taste of the community as a whole. So long as this society remained classless, that is, before individuals in the tribe personally owned means of production, such as slaves, there were no serious conflicts that

might lead to a primary cleavage of taste. Folk art, on the other hand, is a product of society at a more advanced stage of social development. Into the folk style entered the artistic discoveries of intervening millenniums. Unlike primitive art, therefore, folk art implies the existence alongside of it of a cultivated art practiced within the orbit of the ruling class. For once society was divided into classes, folk art was created as the esthetic expression of the laboring classes. This class division drew in its train correlative differences in consciousness, educational training, and interests that were reflected in the demands and capabilities of the class audiences for art. Hence primitive and folk art spring from societies at different levels of social development and class relations.

Although there are essential distinctions between folk and primitive art, connections between them are important. The myth-making of primitive art survives in the folk song and ballad, particularly before the diffusion of science and education in the industrial era. Even today evidences of primitive ritual and magical ideas survive in folk dances, as in some children's rhymes. There are folk songs which retain features of magical cults, such as *John Barleycorn*, in which the death and resurrection of the Corn King are celebrated. Some of yesterday's magic becomes today's fantasy, still exerting powerful attraction in its lingering, subconscious appeal.

What is the essence of folk song? It is song both created and performed by the common people, in contrast to cultivated song which has usually been created by a trained individual and performed for a limited audience. Folk song, further, is made and sung in response to functional needs, from lightening of work and protest against oppression to recreation of the common people. On the whole, therefore, folk song genuinely expresses the values of the people in class societies.

The rigorous study of folk song and ballad emerged early in the nineteenth century as a product of the romantic movement, which was a reaction against the formalism and classicism of the decadent European aristocracy and a manifestation of the intensified nationalism that swept Europe at this time.

Romantic nationalism turned to the folk for inspiration, but for the most part this "folk" was not a social actuality, but a mystical, idealized entity. The romantic folklorists advanced the so-called "communal" theory of folk song and ballad origin. They maintained that in some vague, mystical way ballads "wrote themselves." As Johann Herder said, "Das Volk dichtet" (the folk poetizes), but neither Herder nor his followers could explain what this meant concretely.

However, one method of group creation has been described by G. L. Kittredge. His description is not speculative but drawn from anthropological observation of the Faeroe Islanders, who live in a completely isolated community off the coast of Scotland. This method has also been confirmed by evidence from isolated American communities by other writers.¹ Kittredge draws a picture of a tribal assembly gathered at a festival. The group has a "unity of feeling and common stock, however slender, of ideas and traditions." The act of group creation is a "singing, dancing throng subjected as a unit to mental and emotional stimulus which is not only favorable to the production of poetry, but is almost certain to result in such production. . . . Different members of the throng, one after another, may chant each his verse, composed on the spur of the moment, and the sum of these various contributions makes a song. This is communal composition, though each verse, taken by itself, is the work of an individual. A song made in this way is no man's property and has no individual author. *The folk is its author.*"²

But this method accounts for the origin of perhaps a minority of ballads. For the most significant part played by the folk we must look elsewhere. More basically the people participate in creation as an active audience for whom the individual singer is deputy. For the singer springs from the people; his consciousness is homogeneous with theirs; he expresses their feelings, desires, and aspirations in their own vocabulary, intonation, and rhythms. The singer is not a distinct personality performing like a virtuoso, for his place could be taken by any other member of the people. While performance itself is important to the cultivated audience, in folk song the song itself, however performed, is the center of interest. The singer

is an impersonal vehicle for the song which the people feel to be their own. He is a channel of their emotions and often enough they join him in the refrain. The people are both his source and inspiration; and between the singer and the people there is only the difference between voice and mind.

Folk song lives essentially in the mouth of the people and not, like art song, in the fixed version of its known author. Herein lies the essential difference of folk from all other types of music—it is *folk-transmitted and changes according to the preference of the people in the course of transmission*. For the most obvious fact about it is that each song exists in many versions of both melody and text. None of these numerous versions is more "authoritative" than any other, for each has its own validity. "Folk song," wrote Phillips Barry, one of America's leading folklorists, "is *song alive*, a living organism, subject to all the conditions, and manifesting all the phenomena of growth and change. In the case, for example, of a ballad long current in oral tradition, there are of it many different textual variants, each with a history of its own, which can in some instances be traced, but no single *textus receptus* [authoritative text], besides which the others are without the stamp of authority."³ For song is transmitted through hearing, not reading, from one person or group to another. In the process of transmission changes are introduced into the melody and text because of lapses of memory, adaptation to local interest, or deliberate alteration by the creative act of this or that singer. For the people do not look upon folk song as untouchable, in the way sophisticated persons regard the work of a cultivated poet or composer. The folk song is the people's property and changeable at their will. In other words, folk song is "traditional," that is, it is disseminated orally and not fixed in print, and it is modifiable at any point. Any particular change is made by the individual singer and this is incorporated into the song if it pleases the people. Each change is small and the process of change is cumulative. "We may think of communal re-creation," said Phillips Barry, "as the summation of an infinite series of individual re-creative acts." The "communal" is that element which survives as the fossil evidence of the cumulative effects

of the folk singers' individualism and perpetual state of revolt, both conscious and unconscious, against any stabilized form of text or tune."⁴ How real this process is can be judged from the fact that industrious investigators have collected 300 verses of *Frankie and Albert*, 500 of *Mademoiselle from Armentières* and 1,000 of the *Old Chisholm Trail*. Individuals thus contribute to the common fund and the permanence of that contribution depends in large part upon its vitality, acceptance and perpetuation by the people.

Folk song is therefore in the most literal sense an "art of the people," for it is created by individuals who spring from the lower classes and use their idiom and exploit themes from folk experience. The enduring beauty of many folk songs from all lands upsets the uncritical assumption that creativity is possible only to the upper classes or to those who have had educational and cultural advantages.

There is, however, a school of folk song students that still adheres to this view. Its most vocal adherent in America is Professor Louise Pound, who, significantly enough, advances a highly class-conscious theory of ballad and folk song. She has combated the "communal" theory of creation from the aristocratic point of view. Her basic premise is that the uneducated folk is incapable of creating fine ballads and folk songs and that the best of these originated in cultured circles. That uncultured individuals do in fact change ballads and folk songs in the traditional process of folk transmission, and that they even create them at times, she does not of course deny. What she does affirm is that the product of uncultured creative effort is necessarily inferior. At best, she says, indigenous ballads may in certain cases "show traces of rude power."⁵

The traditional process of folk transmission, she maintains, degenerates the quality of the ballad or folk song: "The general trend is toward degradation, not improvement, by the process of oral preservation and transmission."⁶ For she believes that good taste is the exclusive possession of the cultured classes alone. The survival of the best is not determined by the approval of the whole people, but by "critical agreement of instructed

opinion," which is the "securest anchorage of valuations in matters of taste."⁷ This dogmatic theory is not shared by most of the highest authorities. On the contrary, it is generally recognized that most genuine folk music is a "monument to the critical discrimination and good taste of the singers who have transmitted it,"⁸ as Phillips Barry observed. This point was made even more strongly by Bela Bartok, the Hungarian composer, who studied folk song as intensively as anyone, and who affirmed that good musical taste has been traditionally superior among the folk than among the cultured audience. "Every single melody of the peasant-music in the narrower sense," he wrote, "is perfection itself—a classical example of how the musical thought can be expressed in the most ideal manner with the simplest means and the most finished form."⁹

It is obvious to anyone who has studied folk song that in many cases songs have suffered in quality in the course of transmission by the people. But Miss Pound's view that such degeneration is typical and necessary is just as erroneous as the assertion that degeneration never takes place. A documented refutation of her theory of degeneration was made by G. H. Gerould,¹⁰ who cites evidence to demonstrate poetic power among the folk. He quotes later variations of ballads which are not inferior to earlier versions. Perhaps the strongest evidence in American folk song and balladry against Miss Pound's theory is the creativity of the Negro. Significantly enough, Miss Pound has deliberately avoided consideration of Negro folk song, so far as the writer can discover, for reasons which he does not know. Yet the greatest folk creation in America has been achieved by the Negro and Miss Pound's theory of degeneration breaks down immediately when applied to Negro folk song. As Russell Ames has shown, the Negro song, *The Gallis Pole*, is a variation of the traditional ballad, *The Hangman's Tree*, and is no less fine than the old English variants.¹¹ He further shows that the indigenous Negro song, *The Boll Weevil*, demonstrates that the creation of the illiterate folk poet can approach that of the cultured artist.

Miss Pound's bias results from her failure to grasp the essential fact that changing social conditions under which the

people live determine in large measure the quality of their esthetic life. If she had been aware of this, she would have seen that, where degeneration of the ballad and folk song does occur, it can be explained by the cultural corruption of the people by social conditions, and not by the people's inherent lack of creative power. Gerould is aware of this when he writes: "For a few happy centuries, it appears, the men and women of the countryside lived under such conditions that they could not only preserve in good form but actually improve the stories they sang to traditional melodies."¹²

Yet the reasons for variations in the artistic quality of folk songs and ballads have not been fully analyzed. Only dialectical analysis—investigation of dynamic socio-economic conditions of creation—will yield a completely intelligible explanation. Voluminous and excellent research in the past century has been chiefly concerned with collecting and textual origins and criticism. But this type of research is only preliminary to full understanding. Deficiencies in theory could hardly be more glaring than in the case of one of the most eminent collectors, Cecil Sharp. His final conclusion, after years of painstaking collecting, is that folk song in England is "altered not by environment, but by a fundamental change in the outlook in the people themselves, arising from the attainment of a particular stage in their development."¹³ How the outlook of the people can change without a change in environment, Sharp does not explain. More recent theorists have not been so naive, but for the most part their analysis has remained incomplete. Perhaps the most cogent attempt to date to explain the rise and decline of folk song has been made by an English Marxist, A. L. Lloyd, in his pamphlet, *The Singing Englishman*.

Lloyd shows the functional nature of folk song and its close relation to material conditions. He shows how folk song changed under the impact of economic and social changes in the people's way of living. Folk songs expressed at each stage the interests or grievances of the people. Judging from the folk songs which have survived—true, not a definitive basis for final conclusions—the love song predominated before the eighteenth century as a compensation for the hard, brutal life of the peasantry. Never-

theless, during the fourteenth century peasant revolts, songs of protest were sung. The folk of these early centuries also sang historical ballads as well as clerical songs, satires of the ruling powers, sly songs ridiculing the sexual peccadilloes of the clergy and songs in which Christian themes were overlaid with pagan and primitive ideas. In the eighteenth century, before the advent of the industrial revolution, English life was relatively stable. At that time sentimentalism appeared in the folk song, encouraged by the corrupting influence of the broadside and decadent classicism's artificial, idyllic notion of the peasant. Symptomatic of the time were also numerous songs of the plowboy—in love with the rich man's daughter—who is shanghaied by the girl's father to get him out of the way. News reporting in folk song was common at this time.

But after the middle of the century a sharp change takes place that coincides with the oncoming industrial revolution. Agricultural life was torn from its moorings by the flow of peasants to the factory and the capitalization of farming. The big landowner tended to dispossess the small farmer, agricultural labor was pauperized and forced into the factory. The insecurity of rural life was reflected in the rash of songs about seduction and illegitimacy, poaching became common and was severely punished—which gave rise to songs of poaching. For the first time, songs of violent crime became characteristic. As the nineteenth century wore on, industrialism uprooted the common people, pulled them out of occupations which had called forth folk song, made city amusements more accessible, spread education and newspaper reading, and finally brought them the phonograph, the radio, and the movies. As a consequence of these conditions, folk song decayed rapidly; to an ever-increasing extent it was supplanted by "popular" song.

The process of decay is crystal clear in the case of occupational or work songs. Rapid changes in industrial technique during the nineteenth century account for the death of these songs as living and vital parts of the people's lives. When the textile mill replaced the spinning wheel, the spinning song died. The reaping song did not survive the substitution of the mechanical harvester for the sickle. When the automobile replaced the horse-drawn

cart and carriage, the driver no longer sang the jogging carters' songs to lighten the tedium of the journey. The great period of sea chanties was the era of the clipper ships, from 1815 to 1860, when the hauling up of the sail or the pushing round of the capstan were done to the tune of rhythmically appropriate songs. During their off-hours the sailors would beguile the time in the fo'c'sle with songs of love and home. When the steamboat pushed the clipper off the seas after 1860, the hauling and capstan chanties quickly died for lack of function and the fo'c'sle songs tended to be those same "popular" music hall songs that everyone was singing at home. When the harpoon gun was introduced and whalers were converted into floating factories, whaling songs went the way of the rest.

The same basic forces were operating, with the same effect, on recreational folk song. The latter fulfilled an essential social function. Before industrialism broke down the isolation of rural life, singing and dancing were among the few means of diversion for country people. Thus they were functional because they satisfied the essential need to break the monotony of rural life. The rise and decline of recreational folk song are illustrated in the relatively short life of that unique American folk form, the "play-party."¹⁴ In the latter half of the nineteenth century the population shifted westward into new remote regions like the Dakotas and Nebraska. Before the railroads and highways brought the amenities from more developed regions, the people were thrown completely on their own resources. These migrants brought with them not only an oral folk song tradition, but also fundamentalist religion, which forbade as sinful, dancing and playing of musical instruments. But the young people were not to be denied and they created the play-party to give vent to their irrespressible spirits within the limits of the church prohibitions. The young people devised a "game" in which singing took the place of instruments, and elements of both the square dance and games were combined into something which was not a "dance." The play-party was intended for the entire community, but actually the old people and children were spectators while the young people took part in the "game." The text and tunes of the songs were based on traditional folk songs, adapted to local interests.

B. A. Botkin writes: "In spite of the preponderance of rigmarole, repetition, and refrain [which make up the framework of movement songs], they [the play-party games] contain a good deal of authentic and dramatic portrayal of the background and interests of the players, the objects, activities and characters of rural and pioneer America. Their wild, rude medley of realism and non-sense—childish, humorous, picturesque, and satirically sentimental—is a creation of the American frontier."¹⁵ Thus the play-party supplied recreation under conditions of extreme isolation and its form was determined by traditional folk elements and by the religious taboos of the community. The vogue of the play-party has rapidly receded as the railroads, highways, mail order houses, movies, phonograph, and radio brought standardized commercial amusements to these remote regions.

Thus folk song, which we have taken as the typical folk art, exhibits the general characteristics of a genuine people's art in class societies. Folk art serves the interests of the common people; its subject matter arises out of their everyday life; it is practiced by the people as participants and not merely as spectators; its individual exponents spring from the people themselves. In short, folk art is of, by, and for the people.

The technique of folk song makes it easily grasped and sung. For technique and subject matter are markedly different in folk and cultivated art, as might be expected from the discrepancies in interests and training of the two groups. Up to relatively recent times, and to a certain extent even now, the common people have been cut off from the education and training demanded for both the creation and appreciation of the cultured arts. Thus folk art is essentially the art of a backward and repressed segment of society. This does not by any means imply that folk art is inferior, but only that it is different from cultivated art. Folk forms tend to be simple and easily grasped, but neither does this imply that folk art is any the less finished as art. Thus the typical ballad stanza has four iambic lines of four feet each with rhymes on alternate lines. Or the typical blues stanza, even simpler, has a line repeated twice and an answering third line. The melodic forms are correspondingly simple. This simplicity

is demanded by the oral transmission of folk song. The impersonality of the folk singing technique also stems from this simplicity. The folk singer is immersed in the story he is telling and does not strive after effect, as is obvious from a hearing of authentic folk singers like those recorded in the Library of Congress archives. Nothing reveals the special folk technique better than to contrast performance of the same song by a genuine folk singer and by sophisticated performers like Burl Ives or Richard Dyer-Bennet. The voice of the folk singer is untrained and uses the conventional, naive intonation of the countryside. Here is one description of American folk song technique: "Instead of singing whole or half tones he [the folk singer] often hits in between them, and the sliding pitches, the sudden catches, quirks and scoops in the voice, the characteristic intonations, form almost the essence of folk style."¹⁶ While the simple sincerity and vitality of folk song has a special attraction for the modern city person, this type of song is enjoyed naturally and without affectation by the common people among whom it flourishes, for it immediately reflects their way of life.

But folk song is not a "pure" product of the people. For folk art is not hermetically sealed off from cultivated, any more than the common people are absolutely separated from their rulers. Verse and melody of folk song are no doubt based in part on assimilation of elements of leisure class art. The form and diction of the ballad, for instance, are no doubt based on sophisticated verse forms, although many of its images and allusions are drawn from folk life. A number of upper class features may survive a long time after the ballad has reached the folk. Many ballads, like *The Rising in the North*, which begins, "Listen, lively lordlings all," are upper class in origin and composed by court minstrels. Many classical allusions and upper class features are still found in folk songs in America. But during the vital periods of folk song, ballads of aristocratic origin were modified by substitution of familiar local and class names and circumstances for the original upper class content. This is observable in many traditional ballads of British origin in America. Folk song also suffered serious damage from the intrusion of printed versions by untalented city scribblers beginning with the broadside ballads in

the sixteenth century. The vigorous, orally transmitted folk songs were sentimentalized and cheapened by this commercial exploitation but they regained some of their original vitality when they were reintroduced into the oral tradition after their dissemination in print. Undoubtedly the printing of folk song did tend to lower folk taste, but it did not entirely destroy the traditional process. It was the victory of industrialism at the end of the nineteenth century that all but killed off folk song as a living process.

Just as folk song has upper class elements and survivals, so also it does not number the common people as its exclusive audience. Although folk songs were a predominantly people's expression with the laboring people as their *chief* audience, there is plenty of evidence that the upper classes have also appreciated them. This was particularly true of the late Middle Ages, when the rising bourgeoisie united temporarily with the lower classes against the feudal barons. This temporary unity of interests was the basis for the tremendous popularity of folk song, which was in fact a predominant element of the entire musical culture of the time. "In the early stages of capitalism," wrote Stalin, "one may still speak of a 'cultural community' between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. But as large-scale industry develops and the class struggle becomes more and more acute, this 'community' begins to melt away."¹⁷ This applies to the end of the sixteenth century, when the bourgeoisie in England had triumphed over feudalism, became more sharply differentiated from the lower classes and drew away from them culturally. Yet the upper classes continued to sing folk song in a "slumming spirit." For centuries Christmas carols, a species of folk song, were sung by all classes because these songs had that "universality of appeal which reflects the traditional relaxation of social distinctions in the general winter rejoicing."¹⁸ In the eighteenth century Joseph Addison, after his travels through the English countryside, recommended folk songs, even though they were "the delight of the common people," since they had "aptness to please and gratify the mind." And folk song still retains vitality and appeal for contemporary city people. But the fact remains that folk song expressed the needs of the common people, who consequently were the decisive, formative

audience for folk song. And folk song changed as the class relations of the laboring people were transformed.

Folk art is thus an art of and by the people and is the esthetic response of the common people to their everyday needs and aspirations. But what are the specific conditions in their mode of life that account for the nature of folk song? The writer should like to venture the theory that the explanation lies in geographical and cultural isolation (which in turn are based on socio-economic conditions), and that of these two, cultural isolation is the more basic.

Until recent years the bulk of the people either had no access to the centers of culture or social and material conditions placed culture beyond their reach. On the other hand, even though the homes of the lords and landed gentry were geographically isolated in the country, cultivated art did exist, since they had the means to bring in artists, teachers, books, and examples of the graphic arts. They were also able to keep in contact with centers of culture by occasional visits to the cities. All these facilities were lacking to the peasants, who were thus thrown upon their own resources for esthetic expression. Nor does geographical isolation account for the existence of folk art and folklore in the cities under industrial conditions. This is explained rather by cultural isolation, the inaccessibility to the common people in the cities and in industry of the cultural wealth of mankind. But as industrialism spreads its complete domination more and more over both city and country—in the latter case by capitalization of agriculture and the spread of transportation and growth of technology—both geographical and cultural isolation break down and there is a tendency for folk art to lose its active power and vitality. Distance is minimized as an isolating element with the veining of the country with transportation facilities. Widespread education and training have resulted from the need for more technically trained workers under industrial capitalism; class mobility has been facilitated. With the phonograph, radio, mass publishing, and popular entertainment, mass production has brought the laboring people into the market for all types of commodities, including the cultural, to an unprecedented degree, and “popu-

lar," rather than folk, art fills the esthetic life of the people. Therefore all these interweaving phenomena, whose basic cause is the social condition of the people under the industrial mode of production, have sounded the death knell of folk art as the living expression of the people.

The existence of folk art under industrial conditions is the most severe test for the view that cultural isolation is the basic condition for active folk creation. And we have only begun to realize that folk song can exist under industrial conditions. Until only a few years ago folklorists generally considered folk song to be an exclusively rural phenomenon, but American researches in particular have undermined this view. In England there was folk song in the early nineteenth century among the Luddite machine-wreckers, who are known to have made songs breathing defiance against the advancing machine. Many songs of low quality were also made by the hideously exploited factory workers of nineteenth-century England. But the research into, and collection of, industrial folklore in America provides the fullest evidence for the existence of industrial folk song. An important body of ballads and folk songs grew up around the construction and operation of our great transportation systems. Songs about the Erie Canal, built about 1825, are numerous and survive to this day. The building of the cross-country railroads gave rise to many songs and ballads. Some were rhythmic work songs to ease the work of tamping gravel around the railroad ties or driving railroad spikes. A number of songs about train wrecks had great vogue, of which the most famous was *Casey Jones*.

Perhaps the most widespread and best known of industrial songs are those of the mythical Negro, John Henry, the "steel drivin' man." These tales symbolize the pitting of man's natural strength against the machine when the latter was rapidly displacing manual labor. The lumbering industry also had its mythical heroes like Paul Bunyan even after it was mechanized. In the mining industry there are many songs of disaster, strikes, and bad conditions. Many folk songs have been produced by the American labor movement, particularly the I.W.W. All these industrial songs are genuine folk songs because they were transmitted by oral repetition and changed in the course of transmission, and

they give realistic expression to the real needs and interests of the people. In style and execution they resemble rural folk song, for they are created under conditions of cultural isolation.

Probably the most important and artistically the highest form of urban folk music in America is hot jazz, which should be distinguished from ragtime, crooning, sweet jazz, and the artificially excited music of Tin Pan Alley. Hot jazz originated, so far as we can discover, among unlettered Negroes in the cities and probably developed first in New Orleans. In musical feeling it was the expression of the life of the Negro people, vital, unsentimental, and of intense emotional quality. The sources of jazz are mixed: spirituals, the blues, marching and operatic songs of the whites, and even Tin Pan Alley tunes, with perhaps rhythmic derivations from Africa. Authentic jazz is essentially a folk expression and an outstanding example of a vital folk music that grew out of urban conditions. In this case cultural isolation was reinforced by oppressive conditions imposed on Negroes in the cities which kept them from assimilating the cultural heritage of the West.

The continuing vitality of folk song, both rural and industrial, particularly in parts of America, should not obscure the fact that folk art as a living process is waning under industrialism. Anonymous and non-professional arts more and more give way under capitalism to individualistic, professional, and commercial mass arts. Folk creation persists under industrialism to the degree that the industrial revolution remains incomplete. We have seen how the mechanization of specific occupations in the nineteenth century snuffed out the folk songs to which these occupations gave rise, and how mass-produced arts took their place; and we observed a similar process in recreational folk song in the case of the American play-party. This replacement of folk by mass art takes place inexorably throughout the whole range of the folk arts. In America the continued vitality of folk song is essentially the result of cultural lag. This conclusion does not by any means imply that folk song is either inferior or undesirable; it is merely a scientific observation of the necessary consequences of industrialism, whose full development tends to remove the conditions for the creation of folk art.

The creation of industrial folk song does not invalidate this

conclusion, for close scrutiny reveals that much industrial folklore is a transitional phenomenon. The most vigorous industrial folklore, the John Henry or Paul Bunyan legends, arose during the early period of the growth of industry. The fact that much industrial folklore deals with the matching of the machine with heroic human strength is itself a reflection of the transition from manual to machine labor. And folklore has been vital in industrial conditions where the workers are still one generation removed from rural consciousness. Where creative folk song persists in industrial communities, such as small factory or mining towns, and in the large cities, it is a survival from a pre-industrial mode of life. Hot jazz, though developed under urban conditions, was the expression of an oppressed group which lacked the facilities for mature cultural assimilation of cultivated art. These facts point to the conclusion that folk art may still survive as a creative process under industrial conditions until the cultural isolation of the masses is completely broken down.

On the surface it might appear that the significant revival of interest in folk song during the past decade weakens our view that industrial conditions are essentially destructive of the folk creative process. The foundation for this revival was laid by the work of pioneer collectors like the Lomaxes, Phillips Barry, and others. The gigantic research of the W.P.A. projects into folklore and the recording of thousands of folk songs for the Library of Congress archives gave strong impetus to the revival. The democratic upsurge of the New Deal also heightened interest in folk song and the revival was spread extensively by widely sold phonograph recordings and by the activities of individual folk singers and left-wing performing groups like the Almanac Singers before the war and People's Songs after the war. The revival has two phases. First, folk songs are increasingly being added to the working cultural fund of wide circles of Americans, and it is likely that folk music, like the repertory of classical music and enduring popular songs, has become a permanent part of American cultural life. Second, left-wing groups like People's Songs are trying to carry on folk creation for trade union and progressive political purposes. They are trying to develop a body of songs of protest by collecting songs of this character from all over the country,

by supplying current agitational verses to traditional folk melodies, and by encouraging composition of new melodies in the folk idiom. In the long view, however, this phase of popular culture is likely to pass. When the cultural heritage of mankind is universally distributed under socialism, folk art may become part of a new synthesis incorporating both folk and sophisticated elements.

This process can be seen in practice in the Soviet Union. Folk art is being systematically encouraged and is actually flourishing there to an unprecedented extent. However, this is true at present because the Soviet peoples, particularly in the East, are not yet far removed from pre-industrial conditions. When the various Soviet nationalities assimilate world culture thoroughly, as they are rapidly doing, indications are that their folk art will undergo change in the direction of national arts in which the folk element will be strong. This tendency is clear in the dynamic national musics of the Soviet eastern republics which are a synthesis of their folk music and cultivated techniques and forms from the West. Such a result is a logical conclusion from the career of the best folk artists. Periodic all-Union competitions in the folk arts occur frequently in the Soviet Union. Winners of local and regional folk festivals compete in republic and finally in all-Union competitions. The finest folk artists that emerge from these competitions are offered the best professional training. Thus the best folk talents are channeled into a new kind of professional art in which folk art is raised to a higher technical level. The trend of vital artistic creation is therefore away from simon-pure folk expression.

If this process should continue, as seems most probable, the place of folk art would be taken by a new type of collective expression, a synthesis of valid elements from both folk and cultivated art in a reflection of the classless society. The people themselves will be fully educated in the arts and will form a new type of audience. Folk art should then function in the communist society in two ways. First, folk music would be integrated into the artistic repertory of the Soviet people, becoming a part of the cultural fund. Thus traditional folk songs would be sung perhaps more widely than ever. And, second, folk song would become an integral element in a new artistic synthesis.

10. *Mass Art*

HARD AND FAST DISTINCTIONS between mass and folk art are hard to draw. What they have in common is clear enough—both have the common people as their major audience and, consequently, common characteristics of simplicity and clarity. Between them is a twilight zone in which such works as the Stephen Foster songs dwell. In the clearly defined area, however, folk art, as we have seen, is created by and for the people. Mass, or popular art, on the other hand, is imposed upon the people by those who control the means of production. While folk art is anonymous and changes in the course of oral transmission, mass art has an identified creator; it is individualistic and is usually fixed in print. The people do not have the controlling part in shaping or modifying mass art. The contrast between folk and mass art is exemplified by, say, a Gershwin song and the numerous versions of *Barbara Allen*. The meaning of these differences derives from the social conditions under which each form arises. Folk art is a product of a relatively low level of productive development, or of conditions under which the consequences of a more advanced stage have not yet become fully accessible to the people. Mass art is a child of capitalism, using the new technological mediums for mass dissemination of art—printing and, later, the phonograph and radio. Between the predominance of folk art among the people and its supplanting by mass art crucial new elements appeared. The people were uprooted from their stable, agricultural mode of life. Both in the country and the city a cultural vacuum was created among the people. Folk art was pushed aside. Mass arts of the music hall songs and penny-dreadfuls rushed in to compete with the gin mills to entertain an op-

pressed working class overburdened with long hours of exhausting labor. The mass arts served as narcotics. The people became a mass market for these degraded commodities. The relationship of folk art to audience, its power to express their needs and experiences, was subverted, and commercialism became the critical determinant of mass art and its ideological content.

Commercialism is not of course peculiar to the mass arts, but is a general tendency in the sophisticated arts as well, for the audience for the latter arts has grown tremendously with the widening of the middle classes. And like every other cultural worker in bourgeois society, the artist under capitalism has been subjected to the money power. "The bourgeoisie," wrote Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* . . . "has left no other bond between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash-payment.' . . . The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid laborers."¹

Art objects have tended to become commodities indistinguishable from ordinary useful objects, and produced with the same exclusive concern for the money they bring on the market. But in no field of art is this more crudely practiced than in the popular arts, which are the mass mediums controlled in form and content by the capitalist and run like a business. Capitalist control of the popular arts has promoted a standardized taste at a low level. Mass art is made *for* the people, but is not *of* and *by* the people.

The making of profits out of mass art through mass production and mass audiences and control over social and political thinking of the people is at the root of its special nature under capitalism. In this way control of the arts of the people passed into the hands of the business man; since he paid the piper, he called the tune. In earlier periods, the folk singer, in so far as he was professional at all, was paid directly by the people and had a personal relationship with his audience. Contrast this with the involved and remote connection today between the popular song writer and his audience, sifted through the music publisher, broadcasting system, and phonograph company. The people therefore exercise

through their pocketbooks at most a weak negative influence on the cast and content of popular art. For the most part, popular taste is determined largely by big money sales promotion. Thus the choice and trend of popular art does not rest with the people, as it does in folk art. To be sure, the process of selection of folk art is not conscious, but results from the identification of the folk artist with the people. While the folk artist is the voice of the people, in mass art the people loses its voice. The entrepreneur of art becomes a ventriloquist and, through his hired artists, sings for them. Mass art is thus imposed upon the people and does not express their own needs and interests. It is not an expression, but an exploitation, of the people.

But this exploitation is not a deliberate, immoral act of the business man. It is the outcome of the complex cultural situation under capitalism. Modern technical advances and the financial structure gave rise to mass production and unprecedented vistas of profits. With them came a mass audience for these cultural commodities—created by the flow of population into the cities, the disturbance of rural life through the capitalization of agriculture that began in the eighteenth century, the disappearance of a direct, responsive relation between producer and consumer through the creation of the open market. Although the folk tradition survived in some degree, its hold was rapidly weakened by the growing sophistication induced by the spread of popular education. Ancient modes of thought were broken down by the diffusion of a more scientific view of the world. These developments caused a change in the esthetic life of the people. Folk art gave way to popular art first among the city masses and finally among country people. Because the people did not own the means of mass production, they lost control of their art, which came increasingly under the sway of business manipulation and the drive towards profits with the resulting stifling of protest against adverse social conditions. The business man decided what art should be produced. Since he exploited the esthetic preferences of the people, he tended to dominate the direction in which these preferences developed. This did not happen all at once, it was cumulative. We are today witnessing the ultimate consequences of this tendency in monopoly control of mass arts.

The nature of commercialization can be observed in the vogue for broadside ballads that began in mid-sixteenth century England and continued as a popular art form for several centuries. These broadsides were ballads printed on one side of a sheet, usually ornamented with woodcuts. Their cultural importance can be judged from the fact that, as the leading authority on the subject states, "in the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth, they came to be the chief publications of the London press and the works most dear to the common people."² Although a few were written by some great writers, these ballads were mostly produced by literary hacks. In form they were patterned after the traditional folk ballad and at the head of each was the name of a well-known tune, folk or otherwise, to which they were supposed to be sung. Some ballads were corrupt versions of folk ballads, but most were original. They served functions that are today filled by the popular song, the newspaper, and political pamphlet. Some broadsides recounted events of the day, both important and trivial, the latter corresponding to our "human interest" newspaper stories. Murders, hangings, thefts, matrimonial troubles, tales of freak men and animals, as well as political events and faked interviews with public men, were the topics of many ballads. Another large group were lyrics and love ballads. The social and political influence of the ballads was so great that one writer said in 1703: "If a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation."³

Disreputable characters hawked the ballads, attracting people by singing them. Although the main audience for the ballads was the common people, they were read by all classes. Cultured readers, however, scorned the broadside, because it was pitched to the least intelligent mind, much like a good part of Hollywood movies in our own day, and for the same reason. The objective of everyone concerned with the production and distribution of the broadside was commercial. The printer was interested only in the money he could make; the ballad versifier in the fee he could extract from the printer, and the ballad-monger in street sales. The broadside was therefore a typical, if early, child of capitalism: it was an art form which became a mass-produced commodity with undiluted commercial purpose and a corruption of artistic

integrity. Sophisticated art under capitalism is esthetically superior to mass art because—at least, until the last few decades—it was able to draw upon the best talents. The generally more prosperous audience for sophisticated art could better afford superior art. Versifiers received very little for broadsides, but the artists spurned them not only for this reason, but because many of them had an aristocratic bias and were therefore scornful of this specifically popular art associated with the laboring classes. The result was that the broadside was a commercial art form practiced mainly by poor talents who fed the laboring classes what they thought would sell. And poor taste was nurtured by the rootless life of the city masses, by their lack of cultural education. While the rural masses shared these cultural deficiencies, their art was not rootless and folk song continued for some time after the birth of capitalism. Once begun, this commercializing process confirmed the tendencies to bad taste and perpetuated them until the place of the broadside was taken by yellow journalism and the music hall song and dance. The broadside ballad is thus a revealing example of the commercialization of art for the people under capitalism.

Other popular art forms also sprang up in the new commercial society. In the sixteenth century, for instance, a new popular dramatic form, *commedia dell'arte*, arose in Italy and spread all over the continent. Although patronized by all classes, this drama was primarily directed to the laboring classes. A fixed set of conventional characters like Harlequin, Pulcinella, "zanies" (usually servants), the villanous Spanish captain, and others were woven into many plots of love and intrigue. The actors were instructed in the outline of the plot and improvised lines as the play went on its broadly farcical course. The *commedia dell'arte* was enormously popular and provided the urban masses with their counterpart of the sophisticated drama.

Furthermore, the growth of bourgeois economy drew many members of the laboring classes into the middle classes, and this mobility tended to blur the division between the audiences for middle class and for mass art. In the eighteenth century the expansion of publishing gave rise to popular literature so that the masses became a part of the reading public with its own literature

during the nineteenth century, a movement which was to issue finally in the pulp magazine of our time.

The growth of the factory system and the mechanization of life gave the final blow to genuine folk creation, and at the same time opened the gates wide for sentimental, superficial entertainment. Long working hours deprived the masses of any leisure and exhausted them. They were made unfit for serious art and were ready for trivial entertainment that was promptly supplied by vaudeville and the music hall song. The decay of the crafts brought on by mass production tended to dry up all creativity by the masses, who became automatic machine tenders. William Morris' arts and crafts movement was one protest against the mechanization of common labor, but Morris' solution was an impossible return to medieval craftsmanship. The planless industrial system was not guided by genuine need but by profit, and mass demands were exploited rather than satisfied. Although the working class fought for its economic rights, exploitation of its esthetic life was hardly understood, much less resisted, outside of socialist circles.

But no one knows better than the practitioners of the popular arts the degree to which these are commercial products closely regulated by the standards set by the business man who owns them. The owner restricts output and treatment to subjects which he believes will sell most readily, will not offend any sector of his market and which will not excite the people to social protest. The result is an art of unreality that deliberately avoids vital problems or is at best an oblique, ineffectual treatment of them. The business man of art deliberately seeks out themes and techniques which have an easy and immediate appeal, and he defends the ensuing superficial, escapist, corrupt art by arguing that he is giving the public what it "wants." By refusing to produce "controversial" material or anything that criticizes the status quo, the art business man also exercises rigid censorship over the mass arts and discourages independent thinking by the audience which might weaken belief in private enterprise.

The effect of commercialization, of which Marx and Engels spoke in *The Communist Manifesto* as the foundation of all

human activity upon "cash-payment," has thoroughly pervaded the mass arts in our time. "Use-values," wrote Marx, "are only produced by capitalists because, and in so far as, they are the material substratum, the depositaries of exchange-value."⁴ In order to increase exchange values, the profits from the mass art industries, the capitalist has promoted a seeping corruption of all taste, especially including the popular. As a result the worst possibilities of esthetic life have been exploited, and the advertising mentality has subtly become an integral part of our thinking, has invaded our common language.

Given the central commercial motivation of popular art under capitalism and its function of diverting the people from resistance to capitalism, it follows that monopoly's general tendency to centralization should work its effect on popular art. The distance between the haphazard manipulation of popular taste in the broadside ballad to the codified formulas of the current entertainment world is the measure of the growth of rationalization and monopoly in the mass arts. But this development, however debasing in general, has also caused some gains in popular taste through the wider distribution of great art because art entered the mass market. Industrial design has to some extent corrected the taste of the nineteenth century, since it has proved profitable, and this has introduced a certain beauty in ordinary useful objects. Understanding and appreciation of the fine arts in the capitalist world are now perhaps more general than ever before, thanks to education, museums, and distribution of inexpensive art reproductions. Because of the growth of publishing and especially of cheap reprints, the literary classics, too, are more widespread than ever before, though the distribution of trash is also unprecedented. The radio and phonograph have disseminated a knowledge and a love of music, so that musical taste is now at a high point—accompanied again by a corrupted taste for sentimental popular song. But even aside from the corruption that goes with it, this favorable development falls far short of the possibilities opened up by our efficient mass-production, which presents limitless vistas of mass participation in man's esthetic heritage.

Although the audience for the sophisticated arts—those which

require a degree of training and cultivated sensibility—is probably larger, proportionately, than ever before, it is still a minority audience which cuts across all classes. But because of the cost and training required by these arts, a disproportionately large part of their audiences is drawn from the middle and upper classes. On the other hand, it is a safe guess that the audience for the mass arts—the movies, radio entertainment, popular music, the various forms of fiction and the comics—is also to be found throughout the whole population. But the laboring classes form the bulk of this audience, and hence the “popular” character of these arts. The borderline between popular and sophisticated arts has become more and more blurred as sophisticated techniques, increasingly introduced into mass art, become familiar among the masses, and the audiences become less exclusively a single class. Under mass commodity conditions, there has been a tendency toward the leveling off of taste, so that the movie idols of rich and poor are the same, and hit tunes are just as current among the younger set of the bourgeoisie as among the young people of the proletariat.

Overshadowing our whole popular culture is the film, and for a typical capitalist reason: with the largest investment and the largest audience, it is the greatest profit-maker of all the mass arts. Like all big industry, it is becoming ever more centralized and monopolistic, which means virtually complete control of production and distribution and rigid control of the ideas presented by a small group of finance capitalists. Five major production companies make nearly all full-length pictures and own or control most of the movie theaters in America. As a result the industry is not directed by artists or men with a love and knowledge of culture, but by bankers and real estate men, whose primary concern is to increase profits and perpetuate the reigning bourgeois ideology. But their control does not stop at the borders of the film, for this medium is the most comprehensive in history, including practically all the arts and crafts in its enormously intricate technology. The tendency has therefore been for the film to extend its control into the legitimate theater, into music and literature. Plays and novels

are written with an eye to their movie purchase, and there are close links between publishers and theatrical producers and Hollywood. Each film corporation has its own music publishing house and all popular song publishers and phonograph companies are closely tied to Hollywood. In all these interlocking business relations Hollywood plays the dominant role and thus controls the major output of the mass arts. Furthermore, Hollywood buys off the best artistic talent in music, literature, theater, design and photography with fabulous salaries and then dictates their work down to the finest detail. The reduction of cultural talent to a cash basis is perhaps nowhere so crudely manifest as in Hollywood.

Since the film is a gigantic monopoly controlled by financial barons, the genuine cultural interests of the majority can hardly expect to be served by the movies. Technologically the film in America has made rapid and amazing advances, thanks to the technical genius of the nation. But this extraordinary technique has served as a chocolate coating for the inane, dull, unintelligent reactionary content of the film. The movie producer's claim that he is giving the public what it "wants" is just as oversimplified as the view that the type of film is the sole responsibility of the producers. For we are here dealing with an interacting set of conditions: the mentality produced by capitalism, the level and quality of education among the American masses, the influence of the Catholic hierarchy, the business requirements of maximum profits with least risk, the control of political thinking in support of the profit system. Hence we are dealing with a social situation which is too complicated to be completely controlled by any group of men. Similarly the capitalist system itself operates in an impersonal way, so that any individual or group of individuals have limited responsibility for its operation. This condition points to the crucial difference between capitalism and socialism: under capitalism the people are victims of forces beyond their control and in fact working to keep them in subjection; under socialism, social forces are organized, planned, and directed by the people.

For more than two decades American film content has been a flight from reality. The very few exceptions to this generaliza-

tion have been so striking that they only emphasize its truth. The business "necessity" of offending no part of the worldwide film audience, including reactionaries and fascists, has led to the utmost vacuity. A mindless, insipid Eros is the ruling deity of Hollywood. But this is only a mask for rapacious profit-seeking and perpetuation of capitalist ideology. The actual physical and social conditions of the people are rarely depicted with honesty. Neither are their problems given a hearing, except in a rare film like *The Grapes of Wrath* or more recent films like *Crossfire* and *Gentleman's Agreement*. To judge from the movies, the American average wage is ten thousand dollars a year. Ordinary working people are dressed and housed as though they were earning four or five times their actual wages. Hollywood grossly misrepresents peoples such as the Negro; it engenders contempt for the student, the teacher, and the artist by its dishonest stereotypes of serious cultural workers. It also tends, through ridicule or otherwise, to discourage professional careers for women. What film writers themselves think of the movie is unequivocally indicated in the results of a questionnaire circulated by Leo C. Rosten to 141 writers. Almost all who commented had unfavorable opinions of the initiative of film producers, of the originality and relation to reality of film stories, of the type of picture and story, of treatment of theme, of censorship and supervision by producers, and of film executives.⁵

The influence of Hollywood on popular mentality all over the world, as well as in America itself, is incalculable. Millions of American soldiers during World War II witnessed the reflection of Hollywood movies in every corner of the world. The prophecy of the *Communist Manifesto* is being fulfilled in the film with vengeance: "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. . . . The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. . . . And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local

literatures there arises a world literature.”⁶ If Marx were alive today, he would add, “a world film.” For the internationalization of art disseminates not only great art, but also corrupt mass arts like so much of the production of our film studios. The effect of Hollywood has been to intensify bad taste and to engender superficial and reactionary modes of thinking in all parts of the world. In addition to much that is inferior artistically (despite the slick, expert technique), the film has exploited sentimentality and escapism to their outer limits and has fostered false, shallow values based upon synthetic, falsified, bourgeois social relationships.

Harold J. Laski has shrewdly characterized the over-all significance of the ideological content of mass media. “Most of the instruments through which the picture of the scene to be interpreted to the American is painted,” he wrote, “have become a branch of Big Business. . . . The incidence of the whole picture is enormously and continuously tilted toward the support of vested interests against the democratic tradition for which America came into being as an independent nation. . . . Propaganda, in the sense of persuading an audience to accept some values and reject others, is implicit in most of the films that are made.”⁷ Laski suggests several assumptions that guide those who control the movies: most of the audience want to escape from their drab life and to identify themselves with an unreal, glamorous hero or heroine; the “American way of life” is sound and unassailable. “In general,” Laski continues, “the industry is afraid of all established institutions, afraid of social experiment, afraid of criticism of contemporary *mores* of America. It is for the capitalist against organized labor, though it is careful not to be hostile to the industrious and individual workman. It rarely suggests the importance of social change. . . . The central principle, in short, on which the American film is based is threefold. It is partly an implicit defense of the *status quo*. It is partly an insistence that progress is the outcome of individual improvement. Most of all, it is the triumph of emotion over intelligence, even to the point where emotion is exploited with an intensity that hardly gives intelligence any chance of active expression.”⁸

The pattern of content of the film as characterized by Laski runs through all the mass media. The popular song, an enormously significant element of our culture, is a blatantly commercial product that deliberately avoids serious intent. Like all popular media, its aim is pure entertainment, meticulously avoids social problems, and is presented to the public primarily by the radio, movies, dance orchestras, juke boxes, and sheet music. As in the case of the movies, the entrepreneur of popular song reduces risk to a minimum. In practice this works out as a deliberate restriction of song themes to love and "novelties." Avoidance of the controversial and anything that may "offend" any section of the audience exerts such control, that reference to Germans in songs during World War II was not permitted for fear of offending German-Americans. Nor does the trade permit songs against discrimination. During World War II, some established, successful song writers wished to publish anti-discrimination songs, but the song publishers refused to bring them out. Only songs on the dead level of sentimental love and in the strict eight-bar verse and sixteen-bar chorus are allowed. Experimentation is taboo. Like the movies, songs avoid the everyday realities and assume that the masses live under a far higher standard of living. In periods of depression they promote the idea that love is the only thing that matters. (For example, Gershwin's song from *Of Thee I Sing*, written during the depths of depression: "Who cares if the banks fail in Yonkers, If you got a love that conquers.") Today both writers and composers of skill have gone into the popular song business, and, within its limits, taste has improved in this field. But it is equally obvious that artists are not permitted to create freely: no less than the men at the machine, they must limit their creation to the rigid specifications laid down by the business man. And they must avoid criticism of the social order.

The Negro influence is a major part of popular music, and here in particular we can see the artistically destructive influence of commercialism in art. Negro jazz is one of the few genuine American contributions to music, but its development was vulgarized by conversion to commercial forms. In the 'twenties this musical idiom flourished, but Paul Whiteman converted

it into a vapid, showy, musically dull form. He removed precisely those features of jazz which made it a new and genuine form of musical expression. He toned down its specific intonation, converted it from contrapuntal to harmonic form by depriving the individual player of the creative role that gave jazz its special character. He substituted superficial arrangements for group creation, added gaudy, extra-musical trappings, and altogether let loose a flood of sentimental sound in which we have been engulfed ever since. He bought off some of the greatest jazz creators like Bix Beiderbecke and Jack Teagarden and inhibited their authentic jazz playing. And the fashion that he started conquered the field so completely that jazz players had to succumb to his technique to make a living or were seduced by the prospects of big money. The plaint of Frank Teschmaker, a jazz clarinetist of great talent, is typical: "I wonder if we'll ever be able to play hot jazz for a living?" Like true artists the players wanted to create in their medium and were distressed by the pecuniary need that compelled them to play for the seduced market for commercial jazz. The decline of perhaps the greatest jazz player of all, Louis Armstrong, is a symbol of the commercialization of this authentic musical idiom.

Another mass medium, the radio, instead of serving the real needs of the people, is exploited almost exclusively for advertising purposes. Former Federal Communications Commissioner Clifford J. Durr put the situation succinctly: "Those who are coming more and more to dominate the use of radio channels take over that use without responsibility to the public at all, but only to those clients whose goods or particular idea of the 'American Way of Life' they are employed to sell. Radio is becoming predominantly an advertising medium and production is being taken over by advertisers and advertising agencies who are enslaving the Muses to serve their ends."⁹ Only a few facts can be given here to show the total subservience of radio to advertising. In 1944 about one-quarter of all business of the Columbia Broadcasting System, the American and Mutual networks, was controlled by four advertising agencies. In the same year more than one-half of commercial time on all networks was paid for by the drug, toilet articles, food, and beverage

industries. For every three writers employed by 834 stations in October, 1944, there were four salesmen; and for every dollar paid to writers, \$2.39 was paid to salesmen.¹⁰

Some of the consequences of this advertising control of a major medium can be studied in the "soap operas," so-called because they are sponsored mainly by soap and drug companies. The "soap opera" is a radio serial story that runs fifteen minutes a day, five days a week during the daytime hours. The popularity of this contemptible art form can be judged from the fact that twenty million American women listen to it daily. It is "the most ubiquitous form of mass entertainment ever devised."¹¹ *Half the time* between eight A.M. and six P.M. five days a week is devoted to soap opera by the National Broadcasting Company and the Columbia Broadcasting System. These companies derive 66 per cent of their daytime revenue and one-fifth of their total profit from soap opera. Because women comprise its chief audience, the good characters in soap opera are usually women and the bad characters men. At best these plays are "tedious bilge" and at worst "stark, revolting morbidity."¹² The form is mechanical and totally devoid of originality. Working people do not exist for soap opera. It avoids social significance—where it is not downright reactionary. As in all commercial forms, the real problems and needs of the people are ignored. Prostitution of artistic talent could hardly go further than in soap opera. The claim of advertisers that women like it, is disputed by a survey by the Department of Agriculture which found that, while half of the women of rural America listened, only a quarter of them liked soap opera very much, one quarter disliked it intensely, and one half had no strong opinion. The fact is that soap opera listening is habit-forming and the housewife listens to it because there is nothing better on the air during the day and because "she has been conditioned by years of trash."¹³

Together with the movies, popular music, and the radio, the printed word is a major medium of mass art under capitalism. Language is a sensitive register of the quality of mentality and commercialism has influenced our language in great part through

advertising. The advertising arm of business has been quite explicit as to its intention to "sell" commodities heretofore regarded as "spiritual" and therefore free from pecuniary interest. The result has been a corruption of language. The statement of a leading advertising executive underscores this confusion of commercial and cultural values: "Propaganda is selling. The unions sold collective bargaining to the nation. They have to keep on selling its benefits to us. Very few of us might have religion if it were not sold to us. We buy it because ministers sell it to us." All activity becomes identified with profit-making. One student of languages has pointed to the effects of this tendency upon poetry. He attributes the obscurity of modern poetry to this corruption of our mentalities as manifested in language. Advertising, he says, uses the same technique as poetry, since it makes a similar symbolic, concentrated use of language and is a "poeticizing of consumer goods."¹⁴ He then draws a distinction between "disinterested poetry," poetry proper, which is not created to sell for profit, with "venal poetry," or advertising, which is explicitly written to sell something. This "venal poetry" has insinuated itself into our language, into the very texture of our thought. "Never in history," writes Hayakawa, "has it been so difficult to say anything with enthusiasm or joy or conviction without running into the danger of sounding as if you were trying to sell something. . . . The pre-emption by the venal poet of the common value-symbols of our culture, the symbols of courage, of beauty, of domesticity, of patriotism, of happiness, and even of religion for the purposes of *selling*, that is *advantaging the speaker at the expense of the hearer*, has left the disinterested poet with practically no unsullied symbols to work with than the obscure ones hauled up out of the *Golden Bough* or the *Upanishads*, and practically nothing in common human experience to write about except those negative moods that the ghastly cheerfulness of the advertising pages of the *Ladies Home Journal* has no use for."¹⁵ Although this statement does not wholly account for the obscurity of modern poetry, it surely points to one important element of it.

Commercialism has not only corrupted our language, but has imposed its pattern on popular literature, as it has on other

mass arts, in the vast pulp industry and in popular fiction in both magazine and book form. To satisfy the requirements set by the business man, appeal is made to the least discriminating and least intelligent features of audience psychology, with a consequent prostitution of talent. The supposed invincibility of bad popular taste was given a severe jolt by the experience of the Armed Services Editions, free pocket-sized reprints, including a good percentage of serious and important writing given free to soldiers of World War II. Over 105 million of these books were printed and a taste for reading was developed on a mass scale. The success of this venture, as well as the mounting success of the twenty-five cent "Pocket Book" reprints at about the same time, gave a new turn to book publishing in the United States. Literally hundreds of millions of such reprints have been published by the five major reprint houses. But this development is not an unmixed blessing, for the bulk of these books are at best of indifferent cultural value and, in their acceptance and propagation of bourgeois values, are an ideological weapon for capitalism. A high percentage are mystery stories and Westerns. As investment grows, less risk will be taken in choice of books. Already there is a tendency toward linking independent original publishing with the reprint houses, with the result that dictation to writers may become more overt than it now is. A sinister hint of the prospects for book publishing was dropped in an article (1945) on the cheap reprint business in the business weekly, *Tide*: "There is not much indication that Wall Street is interested in the [publishing] industry but it's an even bet that it will be if the reprint field develops into the big business that is anticipated."¹⁶

These prospects seem to have been changed by the post-war collapse of the book market. Commercial domination of the book market has drastically restricted book publishing. It is more difficult than ever for new writers to get published, and red-baiting hysteria has frightened publishers so that progressive works can be published with the utmost difficulty, if at all. The independence and integrity of book publishing are constantly being reduced.

Business men in all the mass arts—popular book publishing, the movies, radio, and the rest—disclaim responsibility for mass taste. Popular art, they say, is a response to public wants. But the fact is that taste is not spontaneous. It is a result of a conditioning process, whether of the connoisseur or of the masses. The actual state of taste is determined by the available objects upon which taste is formed, the opportunities for assimilating these art objects, current values, and the conditions under which people live. In the final analysis, the modern art industry does not make available to the masses the best art. The education and training on which taste is formed are too costly for most people in capitalist society. The stable social conditions at the root of good taste do not exist among people under capitalism. The capitalist objective of quick profit does not encourage careful work or less immediately popular forms that interfere with quick turnover. The capitalist aim of breaking down sales resistance prompts the creation of works that have a quick and easy appeal, for these works make advertising easiest and most successful. And underlying these immediate considerations that continually work against business acceptance of the best is the bourgeois fear of any material that might make the masses independent and progressive. Hence those improvements in taste that do appear from time to time are for the most part forced upon the business man by public pressure. Public taste is low primarily because of the inferiority of art objects made available to the public. When the public becomes satiated and develops a real resistance to this inferior art, the business man is forced to change his product and improvement in mass taste may result.

Taste has a physiological and psychological basis. Those who are cynical about the inevitable badness of popular taste believe that the people have neither the intelligence nor the sensibility to sustain good taste and they point to current evidence. But the long history of folk art, which is now generally acknowledged to be in the best taste, should alone refute this view. Furthermore, this view ignores the fact that taste is not an inherent quality but the product of conditioning. Mass taste, therefore, can be explained only as the response to the art which conditions it.

If the commercial motivation of artists was removed over a period, the good taste responsible for folk art would reassert itself under industrial conditions. But this commercialism can only be permanently removed under socialism, and only here lies the hope for art.

There is every reason to believe that the highest possibilities exist for good mass taste, if only it is given a chance. The argument that the masses are by nature incapable of good taste is dogmatic nonsense. For the enormous flexibility of the human mind and sensibility is by now pretty well demonstrated. The masses have become adapted to novel, complicated developments in education, technology, and industry. The scope of knowledge of the ordinary man today is amazing, when compared with the mentality of two hundred or two thousand years ago. The ordinary man carries with him a range of technological and scientific theory inconceivable to the greatest geniuses of the past. The limits of such developments cannot even be foreseen. Mass esthetic perception has also broadened and deepened, but in a fluctuating manner. Whereas popular education in science and technology required adherence to reality in the proving ground of industry, the popular arts unfortunately have been used in exactly the opposite direction. The same motives that promoted technological education and discovery, namely profits and the perpetuation of the bourgeois order, enforced in art the tendency away from reality. But there is no reason why the masses should not be susceptible to serious and disciplined art. The possibilities for sophisticated, good mass taste opened up by industrialism can be realized, once the motives for commercial art are removed, under socialism.

11. Art Under Fascism

DICTATION by the capitalist of the form and ideological content of the mass arts means, in fact, subjection to both the profit-motive and to the aggressive class program of monopoly capitalism. In this dictation lie the seeds of total degeneration of the arts under fascism, for the decline into fascism is but an intensification of control of society by the big bourgeoisie. Fascism differs from the earlier stage of monopoly capitalism in that the former is capitalism *in extremis*. It is, in the words of Georgi Dimitroff, "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital." The degree of control over the mass art industries is a reflection of intensified monopolization.

This trend in the art industries, like the general economic movement, has taken a leap forward since World War II. With this trend has come the danger of fascism in the United States. For monopolization drags in its train the drive to destroy bourgeois democracy, to cripple the trade union movement, and to wipe out civil liberties and every political expression of the working class and other progressive groups. The beginnings of fascist enslavement of the arts have already begun to appear.

The arts are a special object of attention for fascism because they deeply influence the thoughts and feelings of the masses. Fascism uses art as one of its instruments for the enslavement of the people, as it does all the media of communication. For the fascists must reckon with the fact that the masses have been drawn into public life, have become aware of their potential power, and are struggling to become masters of their own destiny. Under industrialism the masses have become literate,

articulate, organized into trade unions and working class political parties. The development of capitalism has required mass education, limited democracy, a drawing of the masses into the market for the products of mass production, including the mass arts. The people must therefore be deceived into acquiescence to fascism.

Establishment of the fascist system requires that the ideological achievements of bourgeois democracy be discredited. To deny these advances in thought and feeling the fascists have to promote irrationalism and anti-intellectualism. "The intelligentsia are a useless refuse of the nation," said Hitler.¹ "Intellectual activity has poisoned our people," Goebbels makes the hero of his novel, *Michael*, say.² Only by a breakdown of reason and the rejection of the advances of the social sciences can the fascists make possible the wide acceptance of their obsessive racist fantasy. For these scientific advances are a reflection of the early progressive phase of capitalism, its competitive, *laissez-faire* stage during which a certain intellectual freedom accompanied the era of free competition and the free market, both of which are being eliminated by monopoly capitalism. This reactionary ideological tendency of monopoly capitalism is necessary for acquiescence to their dictatorship. Fascist ideology explicitly wars against the philosophy of the French Revolution and its continuation in more modern forms of any progressive ideas. Fascist ideology even reverts to the Middle Ages, as in its glorification of the medieval Germanic peoples.

Art therefore grows moribund in the stages of imperialism and fascism because this system of ultra-reactionary ideas is enforced as the ideological basis of art. This insult to human intelligence and sensibility cannot be the basis of art. The fascist demonology disintegrates the artistic processes of the modern mind. Mythology, it is true, was the inspiration for most, if not all, great art in primitive times and in early civilizations when science did not exist or was rudimentary. While pre-scientific mythology was a progressive reflection of socio-economic development of the period, the crude fabrication of absurd, anti-scientific, and regressive ideas of fascism is an organized lie and a deliberate attempt to set humanity back

to barbaric modes of thinking. Truth enlightened by the scientific conception of man can be discarded by modern men only at the cost of the dissolution of art. For the artist creates out of progressive thinking of his day: he genuinely applies the best man has known up to his time. But Hitler founded the Nazi ideology on the deliberate fostering of lies, the destruction of scientific progress in social science, and the destruction of advanced social institutions. Hitler attempted to destroy the individuality of the artist by imposing a dead and artificial system of ideas within which creation was dictated.

Art is in its essence the effort to depict reality and its conflicts, but the fascists forced the artists to abandon the search for social truth and to evade the struggle for a more adequate life. Truth is humanizing; the Nazi lie is degrading and dehumanizing. Fascism brutalizes men and makes perverted ignoramuses of them. Art under fascism reflected this perversion of the human spirit by its sterility and falsity.

The actual mortification of the arts under fascism gives indefeasible witness to the fact that the artistic consciousness cannot be forced into the fascist mold and remain artistic.

The record of the arts in Nazi Germany demonstrates what happens to the arts under fascism. Racism was fully applied to the arts by the Nazis. Race and blood, said the Nazis, were the source of all human expression: "All the expressions of life spring from a specific blood, a specific people, a specific race," said one Nazi theorist.³ The racial theory not only inflated the German people with the conceit of inherent superiority over all other "races," but it was a useful instrument for channeling all social dissatisfaction into anti-Semitism. The Jewish people, said the Nazis, were not only an "inferior race," but also the source of all the evils and the degeneration of modern society. By the annihilation of the Jews and their "influence," said Hitler, health would once again return to German society. "Blood and race," he said, "will once more become the source of artistic intuition."⁴ For "cultural creative work is the most sensitive expression of a talent conditioned by blood."⁵ So far did the Nazis carry their exclusionist "blood" theory that

the people's very perceptions are conditioned by "blood." Consequently, said Hitler, cultural creation by one race "cannot be understood, far less appreciated, by individuals or races who are not of the same or related blood."⁶ Art was not created for all humanity, but for a specific "race" alone. "The silly talk about the international character of art," said Hitler, "is as stupid as it is dangerous."⁷

The Nazis set out to "purify" the cultural life of the German people, which, they said, had been corrupted by "Jewish Bolshevik" influences in the whole era since the French Revolution, and particularly during the Weimar Republic. "The Jews . . . through their control of the Press . . . continued to poison our sound appreciation of art," Hitler explained.⁸ What this "Jewish control" of Germany's cultural life meant, said Goebbels, "only we can measure, who had any idea of how deep the Jewish influence had penetrated German cultural life. Nowhere did the Jews command and dominate so illimitably and undisturbed as here."⁹ Never in modern times was there such a totally unfounded, irrational brew of lies as in the Nazi identification of everything that hindered absolute monopolist control of society with the "Jewish," "Bolshevist," "international," "Marxist," and even "capitalist." For fascist demagoguery even pretended opposition to capitalism in its effort to win support of the working class and the declassed petty bourgeoisie. Robert Ley, leader of the fascist Labor Front put the matter quite explicitly: "The crux of the Nazi program for the sciences and the arts—as, indeed, of all Nazi programs, civil and military, domestic and foreign—is to be found in their 'struggle for the worker's soul.'"¹⁰ The fulfillment of this program demanded the twin technique of terroristic repression and displacement of reason by an insane ideology.

The great symbolic act of Nazi destruction and perversion of culture was the book-burning of May 10, 1933. All day long storm-troop youth raided the libraries and bookshops and gathered "Jewish-Bolshevist" books for the burning. In Berlin's Opernplatz, 20,000 books were thrown into the fire—works of Marx and Engels, Karl Liebknecht, Sigmund Freud, Thomas

and Heinrich Mann, Stefan Zweig, Alfred Doeblin, Theodore Plievier, Karl von Ossietzky, Egon Erwin Kisch, Albert Einstein, and many others. In Breslau, 5,000 books were hurled into the fire; in Munich, one hundred. At the climax of the Berlin holocaust of culture, Joseph Goebbels delivered an oration. "Jewish intellectualism is dead," he shouted. "National Socialism has hewn the way. The German folk-soul can again express itself. These flames do not only illuminate the final end of an old era, they also light up the new."¹¹

The symbol became full reality with the decree creating the Reich Chamber of Culture (*Reichskulturkammer*) on September 22, 1933. Total control of the cultural life of the country was placed in the hands of Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda and People's Enlightenment, through the chamber, with its constituent chambers of music, arts, theater, literature, press, radio, and film. Goebbels appointed the officers of each chamber and these officers appointed their subordinates. All officers were subject to removal by Goebbels at any time. The purpose of these chambers was to regulate and control production in all these spheres of culture. Anyone who wished to be employed in any phase whatsoever of these arts had to be a member of the appropriate chamber. All Jews and persons antagonistic to national socialism were excluded from membership in the chamber, and hence could not practice their art professionally. The purpose of the chamber was thus set forth by Dr. Karl F. Schreiber, its counsellor: "Its main task is, and will be for a long time, to operate within the cultural professions *separating the tares from the wheat*, and to decide *between the fit and the unfit*. . . . To decide between the sound and the transitory and to *divide by blood and spirit German from alien*, that is the 'direction' of National Socialist cultural leadership, since that is also the direction of national socialist will. What within the new forms will be created is a tremendous leader corps, made up of all who participate in any wise in the process of forming the national will, from the greatest spiritual creations to the most insignificant helper, from the man who does the creative work to the last retailer who hawks literature and journals on the streets and railway stations."¹² Thus culture was to be totally

nazified under the eye of Goebbels. On the fourth anniversary of the founding of the chamber, Goebbels could announce: "We have eliminated the Jews and restored again into German hands the leadership of German spiritual life of the nation and the world."¹³

The Reich Culture Chamber was a reflection in the cultural sphere of the monopolization of economic life. For the chamber was actually the organ of cultural monopoly, that is, absolute limitation of ideological expression to that which fortified and consolidated the power of Nazi monopoly capitalism. The British scholar H. G. Atkins characterized the literature chamber as "a vast intellectual monopoly."¹⁴ Or as E. Y. Hartshorne wrote of the Reich Culture Chamber: "The monopoly is absolute. Outside the *Kulturkammer* there is no possibility for activity in these fields, and to be active one must meet the test of rigid conformity."¹⁵ Further, concentration of power was manifested in the cultural sphere in the practice of the Leader Principle (*Fuehrerprinzip*) which governs the administration of the chamber. Goebbels himself was the leader of all German culture, as the deputy of Hitler himself, and exercised absolute personal control. As in the relation of worker to the economic master under fascism, the cultural workers could only obey the dictates of their cultural leaders. They did not participate in decisions nor were they consulted on policy. Either they created in line with the directives of Goebbels, or they did not create at all.

Mass culture under the Nazis was distributed through the National Socialist Community of Culture, a mass body which organized audiences through clubs and circles. This Community of Culture worked under the control of Alfred Rosenberg. Membership in these clubs required a declaration of allegiance to the Nazis. This organization was taken over by the Strength Through Joy (*Kraft durch Freude*) organization, part of the Labor Front, and had the function of providing the masses with leisure time and cultural activity which would at once keep them diverted, reinforce the Nazi viewpoint among them and obviate any development of anti-fascism among them. Concentration was on the organization of theater audiences at cheap rates for the presentation of plays that tried to bind the workers closer to

Nazism. The Nazis thus controlled the whole range of cultural production by rigorous co-ordination (*Gleichschaltung*) both in the creation and distribution of the arts.

The content of the German arts changed radically with the Nazi coming to power. Experiment stopped and nearly every creative worker of outstanding talent either left Germany or ceased creating. German creation varied from escapist themes to immediate political propaganda. As in every other phase of Nazi ideology, the arts were permeated with racialism and intense nationalism. They were required to be "folkish" (*Volkhafte*), that is, they were supposed to express a spurious folk quality based on the supposedly peculiar "Aryan" racial character of the German people, which heightened the separation of German from other "inferior races." The arts were to be explicitly "anti-international," that is, they denied the common interests of ordinary people all over the world and the possibility of international harmony. Instead they glorified war and the martial virtues and promoted absolute loyalty to the Fuehrer as the highest virtue. The Nazis looked back to the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as the age to emulate because the vigor of German folk art was at its height during this period; on the other hand, they rejected all the values established in the west by the French Revolution, from liberalism to democracy. A synthetic medieval German "folk" mentality was accepted as peculiarly German, while the modern democratic spirit was in contrast regarded as "West European."

Several themes dominated Nazi literature. Escape into the past in historical novels had the advantage that contemporary politics could be avoided and many writers exploited this immunity. Some writers devoted themselves to the "blood and soil" (called "*Blubo*," condensation of *Blut und Boden*) literature in a reactionary back-to-the-soil viewpoint in which the "civilization" of the German provinces was exalted in opposition to the evils of the big city. These writers avoided depiction of the hardships of rural life or the causes for that hardship and their books helped advance the Nazi agricultural program by bathing the peasant in the aura of mystical racism.

Before World War II there was also a flood of books about World War I in which the Nazi interpretation that defeat in the war was caused by betrayal on the part of democrats was pressed home. Martial virtues were glorified and a psychology of revenge was generated. This was in fact part of the psychological preparation for the war the Nazis were plotting. Also as part of this preparation many books appeared on the theme of *Lebensraum* and the glories of colonization and expansion in Europe. In the drama the problem play vanished from the German stage and the new plays were so dull that they bored even the Nazi audiences. One observer reported that in 1936 about 250 plays were produced, nearly all of which were on historical themes and hardly a new playwright appeared. Absurd plays about World War I were plentiful, including a rash of plays about the stupid sacrifice of a whole regiment in a daylight attack on entrenched troops at Langenmark in 1914. Thus was the profligate sacrifice of the common German soldier glorified for the war the Nazis were cold-bloodedly preparing.

The Nazis promoted the reactionary in art as in politics. This extended to all the arts. In music the Nazis encouraged a prosaic style characterized, as one Nazi writer wrote in 1937, by "straightness of line and form, plainness and calmness,"¹⁸ on the theory that this responded to the needs of a soldierly age. In the fine arts, too, the Nazis limited their art to a "salon style," a form of academicism that rejected all art since 1870. Of the outstanding contemporaries, they rejected the sculptors Barlach and Lembrueck, the satiric artists Otto Dix and George Grosz who had lampooned bourgeois German life mercilessly. Experiment in art was taboo. The Nazis turned their backs on portions of their own German tradition by rejecting Cranach and Gruenewald, the latter because he was tainted with a psychosis of original sin and lacking in the "heroic." And because Rembrandt painted Jews sympathetically, because he was "the painter of the ghetto," he was also in the bad graces of the Nazis. The subjects of Nazi paintings followed that in the other arts: pictures of peasant families with numerous children, blond boys marching in uniform, steel-helmeted soldiers, scenes from

World War I, allegories of the muses and graces that gave a pretext for depicting nude females pornographically, landscapes from various parts of the Reich—all in the most conservative painting styles. Lincoln Kirstein has described the Nazi style of painting as “literally representational on the most superficial illustrative level, . . . anti-imaginative, anti-psychological, anti-fantastic, and essentially (while pro-natural) anti-realistic.”¹⁷ It was reactionary both in form and content.

Thus the Nazis brought catastrophic ruin upon the German arts, as upon every aspect of German life. Almost every fine talent including every Jewish artist was either expelled from Germany, went into retirement, or into voluntary exile. Production in the arts under the Nazis was quite sterile. In 1939, Erika and Klaus Mann observed of Germany that in six years “not one new poet, musician, or artist had come to the fore. . . . Everywhere the same lowering of standards by order, wherever you look—at the universities, in the literary reviews, on the stage or the films, in the art exhibitions and publishing firms.”¹⁸

The German experience with fascism was no different from Italy's in this respect. For Herbert L. Matthews observed in 1943 that “In twenty-one years Fascism (in Italy) has not produced a single great scholar, author or artist. Indeed, it has all but killed Italian scholarship and art.”¹⁹ Benedetto Croce himself had said in 1929 that literature in Italy had been extinguished. In Germany the great tradition of musical performance had degenerated. The eminent British musicologist, Ernest Neumann, had this to say about the Nazi ban on “non-Aryan” musicians: “Already one is becoming painfully conscious that the standard of German [musical] performance, from conducting to fiddling, is sinking to one of merely respectable mediocrity.”²⁰ Nazi musical life was devitalized.

Under fascism the great German film art so declined that audiences fell off disastrously. While 132 full-length feature films were produced in 1932, the number fell to 95 in 1938. In this year, only 12 per cent of the Germans went to the movies once weekly, while in Britain in the same year 40 per cent attended. About half of the German films were non-German in their setting because producers were afraid to deal with

stories of dramatic conflict in the Reich. The same was true of the theater. In 1932, at the depth of the depression, 30 theaters and operas were running in Berlin; in 1936 only 24 were running, and a third of these played Shakespeare or classical opera. Of German dramatists of any consequence, only Hans Johst had continued to write, and he is the author of the infamous line, "When I hear the word culture, I slip back the safety catch of my revolver." The Nazis tried to claim one of Germany's leading poets, Stefan George, who was then an aged man, but George moved to Switzerland and persistently refused to have anything to do with the Nazis—a snub which did not deter the Nazis from claiming him after he died. No new poets of significance appeared under the Nazis.

Nor is this sterility unexpected from a people who either called Heinrich Heine a criminal or denied that he ever lived, for he was the Jewish author of the text of a song that every German sang, *The Lorelei*. Book publishing declined, as was shown by official German statistics. Together with the decrease in publication of books by Germans, the number of translations increased. The export of German books dropped in 1936 to one-quarter of the 1932 figure. The Nazi literary product bored the German people. In preparation for Christmas, 1935, the Nazis published a list of 2,000 approved and recommended books. The limitation of themes was drastic. "Barring a few cook books, several volumes on technical points of taxation and one—only one!—edition of classics, the contents of these 2,000 books are exhaustively described by the following terms: war-incitement, colony-propaganda, cult of the Fuehrer (Hitler) and race mania. It is exceedingly difficult to explain how totally, completely all other themes are excluded."²¹

But the poverty of the arts under Nazism, if they were not wholly crushed under the heels of the storm-troopers, was peculiarly manifested in a little known fact—the Nazi prohibition of art criticism. On November 26, 1936, Goebbels issued a decree forbidding art criticism in the Reich. Nazi attempts at art could not stand the scrutiny of even German critics. The Nazis were terrified of all criticisms in any field, fearing the

exercise of critical intelligence. They had been stung by the failure to bring forth art of any merit. Hitler became impatient with criticism, which could not help but insinuate this failure. "A cultural renaissance," he said, "cannot spend its force in leading articles, in art criticism, in discussions and treatises on art: it must lead to a positive cultural achievement."²² Goebbels echoed this thought in his decree outlawing criticism, and advised critics that unless they could do better than the artists they condemned, they had better stop criticizing altogether. Henceforth, said the decree, critics are forbidden to evaluate art: critics could only write a "description" (*Darstellung*) of art. His decree "should give the public the possibility of forming its own judgment."²³

This is a typical piece of fascist demagoguery. For no one would dispute that the people should make up their own minds about art. And in the long run the people do determine what art shall survive. But the critic plays an integral part in the development of taste in modern society, for he is especially trained to serve as a bridge from the artist to the audience. His function is to guide public taste, as well as to help the artist to solve his problems, both technical and human. "Without criticism," said A. A. Zhdanov during the recent controversy over the Leningrad writers, "any disease can be driven deeper in and it will be harder to deal with. Only bold and open criticism helps our people to improve themselves, rouses them to march ahead, to overcome shortcomings in their work. Where there is no criticism, staleness and stagnation take root and there is no room to move ahead."²⁴ Criticism has been the steady vehicle of human advance.

Goebbels would eliminate criticism from fascist society and for a highly suspicious reason. For criticism, he said in commenting on his decree, is a "hangover from the democratic world spirit. . . . This criticism bears typical Jewish characteristics."²⁵ What Goebbels feared was not that the public would not make up its own mind, but that the falsities of fascist art might be exposed. He held tight control on the public mind through his all-embracing propaganda machine and he saw to it that the public was held in line under threat of the concentration camp.

But the play of the critical intelligence could not be tolerated under the thought-control that Nazism imposed. Apparently art

criticism had become a veiled method of attacking the regime itself. This was probably the reason for one provision in the decree that was a dead give-away. "Art discussion," the decree ordered, "should be signed with the name of the author," an obvious form of intimidation. The use of criticism to smuggle in attacks on the Nazis reminds one of art criticism under another despotism, tsarist Russia. It is well known that the school of literary criticism in Russia, launched in the nineteenth century by Belinsky and carried on by Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Pisarev, and others, was a major medium of revolutionary social thought. Goebbels met the threat of criticism with the only means the Nazis knew—suppression. And his excuse was that critics martyred the artist. Let it not be said after fifty years, he declared, that genius under the Nazis was martyred. Yet Nazi art did not improve. Hitler was enraged by foreign criticism, and blustered a big lie in 1938: "German architecture, sculpture, painting, drama and the rest bring today documentary proof of a creative period in art, which for richness and impetuosity has rarely been matched in the course of human history."²⁶

This phase of art has passed into history with the Nazi regime itself. Nazi art was sterile by its very nature because it was the enemy of truth and humanity and was dead before it was born: it survived on borrowed time until the people organized its extirpation. But fascism itself is far from dead in the world; only the Hitlerian phase has passed. For fascism does not commit suicide. It must be wiped out by a people's coalition acting in defense of their democratic rights and by building a people's government. The danger of fascism is still imminent because the conditions that caused it to rise—monopoly's desperate effort to hold power—are with us in their most severe form. Capitalism is crumbling all over the world and the United States, the most powerful capitalist country, is acting as receiver for the outworn social system. Our country is therefore supplying crutches for reaction and fascism all over the capitalist world to extract a profit from this bankrupt world. But the old age of capitalism has also overtaken the United States. In order to remain in power, monopoly must break down American democracy. The big money

power must attempt to repress people's forces at home, as well as abroad. In domestic as well as foreign policy this desperate campaign is being waged in the name of a crusade against communism, but its real meaning is a drive towards both fascism and war. A war economy is being imposed on the United States and on the countries under its tutelage in the attempt to ward off the coming economic crisis and to prepare for aggression against the Soviet Union and the new democracies.

But the deep hold of the democratic tradition on the American people forces the big money power to pursue these objectives under the guise of a defense of "freedom" and "free enterprise." This spurious purpose can only be carried through by paralyzing the people's reason. Just as Hitler paralyzed the mind of the German people by his demagoguery of big lies, so the ruling powers in the United States are trying to achieve the same end by anti-communist hysteria. This process has been going forward with mounting intensity since the end of World War II. The rights of labor are being pared away, culminating in the Taft-Hartley Law and aided by the splitting of the labor movement by red-baiting. The Constitution is being steadily undermined by flouting freedom of thought through such measures as the "loyalty" decree, which initiated a fascist inquisition on government workers. The ideological attack on democracy was spearheaded by the Un-American Committee, an ideological arm of the monopolies and controlled by outright fascists, and extended by auxiliary state un-American committees. The intellectual and cultural climate of our country is being created by pro-fascists.

We are therefore at this writing witnessing something like a *Gleichschaltung* of the arts and all media of communication in the United States. The infamous Hollywood investigation in 1947 threw a paroxysm of fear into the single-minded profit-makers in Hollywood and caused them to retreat like rabbits before the campaign of intimidation. Soon after the inquisition, which resulted in the contempt of Congress citation of the ten courageous Hollywood progressives, the fascist-like nature of the entire operation was indicated by the following frank statement by Gladwin Hill in the *New York Times* on November 30, 1947: "Not only will anyone with pronounced left-wing leanings have

difficulty getting a job of any consequence at the studios from now on but, one important executive hazarded privately, the prevailing attitude in public opinion will stifle for several years hence the production of films containing any 'social significance' lest they be considered 'red'. . . . And it is certain regardless of what happens outside the sound stages, Hollywood is going to tread an extremely cautious line in what it puts before the public." And all this in the name of "freedom"!

The fascist paralysis is creeping throughout American cultural life. Publishers have frankly told their authors to tread lightly on progressive ideas in their works, creative or expository. The relative freedom of ideas under bourgeois democracy is being daily narrowed by the businessman of the mass arts for fear that his investment will be endangered by the red smear. For their part, cultural workers are drawing in their horns for fear of being accused of "subversion." Education is being perverted from top to bottom by censorship of progressive ideas; teachers are being hounded by written and unwritten laws against free expression. Academic freedom is being violated in the universities by the firing of teachers who worked in the Wallace Presidential campaign of 1948 or who were members of the Communist Party. One college teacher was dismissed because he wrote an article in an academic journal that the theory propounded by Lysenko on the inheritance of acquired characteristics should be discussed by scientists. The oppressive intellectual atmosphere engendered by the desperate drive of monopoly has intensified the prevalence of philosophies of defeatism or escape among creators in the sophisticated arts. Everywhere in the capitalist world writers are creating, as the French Communist leader Roger Garaudy has said, a "literature of the graveyard."²⁷

Too many cultural workers have retreated before the fascist intimidation of our cultural life. Passivity of the artist before the threat of fascism, failure to exemplify in his work a militant anti-fascist spirit of resistance, is softening both the people and the artist. Unless the artist casts off his defeatism and obscurantism, he is in danger of accepting a fascist reality and rationalizing his creative mentality to it, which means the destruction of true art, as the Nazi example has demonstrated. André Malraux, the gifted

French novelist, has already shown how this can happen with his espousal of DeGaulle's neo-fascism. The passive submission of many American artists to the red hysteria and their failure to resist it is another sign of the disintegration of capitalist culture. This passivity is a betrayal of art itself. For fascism means the death of art, and failure to resist its encroachment is equivalent to abetting the decline of art.

But not all artists and cultural workers are taking this attack lying down. Many belong to the Communist Party, which is leading the American fight to turn back the fascist forces. Many cultural workers rallied to the Progressive Party, which is the broad people's repository of the genuine American tradition of freedom. A profoundly significant symbol of this cultural workers' resistance to the approach of fascism was the great Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace, held on the eve of the signing of the Atlantic Pact under the auspices of the National Council of Arts, Sciences and Professions in New York City in March, 1949. Despite a shameful distortion of the nature of the conference by the State Department and the press, despite the hysterical outcry against it by clerical fascist forces led by the Catholic War Veterans, and by obsessive anti-Soviet intellectuals, several thousand artists and intellectuals assembled to make known their determination that fascism and war shall not overtake the world again. The international delegates to the conference signaled the worldwide unity of all sane, democratically minded forces throughout the world in this struggle.

All elements of the world's progressive cultural life are determined that art shall not once again be subjected to the brutalization and sterilization imposed by fascism. They are allying themselves with labor and other people's movements to prevent the murder of freedom and oppression of the people. For they have learned the lesson of Nazi fascism. The victory of these progressive forces will not be easy. Dangerous times lie ahead for democracy and art. But the issue is not in doubt. For the forces of history are with the people and their victory is inevitable. And in this victory lie the hope and future of art.

12. *Art Under Socialism*

WE HAVE TAKEN the reader through somber country—the sterility of art under fascism and the debasement of art under the twin evils of commercialism and ideological enslavement in our decaying bourgeois democracy. As capitalism falls deeper into crisis, we have seen, the agony of the arts grows more acute. Except for the artist who looks for inspiration to the cause of the working class, the artist in the capitalist world has either capitulated to his monopolist master or has taken refuge in pessimism or a total absorption in form for form's sake, as in the case of the non-objective painters.

The basic disease of the artist is an unhealthy relation to the masses of the people—of whom the working class form the majority—or an almost total lack of such a relation, in the case of the esoteric artists in all fields. But for a brief period in recent years art in America seemed to experience a renewed vitality under the impetus of progressive upsurge in the Roosevelt era. At that time nearly every artist felt the impact of the growth of working class strength and was brought closer to the needs and mood of the people. This tendency found its most vital expression in the WPA projects, when government sponsorship removed the profit motive from a considerable sphere of American artistic life. This was an exciting period of experimentation and saw an unprecedented extension of the audience for art. The WPA Federal Theater, Music and Art projects spread the arts into regions and strata where they had been inaccessible before.

Hallie Flanagan, Federal Theater director, has written of her own project that "the greatest achievement of these public theaters was in their creation of an audience of many millions, a waiting audience. This audience proved that the need for theater

is not an emergency.”¹ Between 20 and 25 million people of average income, who could not afford the admission price to the legitimate theater, attended the Federal Theater. A wide range of plays was presented—the classics, revivals of distinguished contemporary American plays, and even some unproduced plays. The project established children’s theaters and caravan companies playing to immense numbers in parks, hospitals, and village greens. The project discovered “that millions of Americans want to go to the theater if it can be brought geographically and financially within their range.”² The Federal Theater also stimulated creation of one of the few American contributions to the drama, “The Living Newspaper.” This theater was only the beginning of a national theater and had as one aim the creation of vigorous regional theaters all over the country. When the project was cut off, theatrical life died in hundreds of American communities.

The Music Project similarly tapped the musical resources of the people. A visiting British critic, James Agate, found it “easily the highest cultural force in America, actual and potential.”³ All over the country there was an awakening of mass musical life. This was the conviction of Earl V. Moore, director of the Music Project: “In spite of all the marvellous resources this country now has: orchestras, choral societies, opera companies, schools and colleges of music, there has never been presented on so gigantic a scale an opportunity to increase the potential future audience for all forms of music performed by ‘live’ musicians as is offered by the WPA Musical Program to the great masses of our underprivileged population today.”⁴

An immense and waiting audience for the fine arts was also discovered by the Federal Art Project. Like all the projects, this one addressed itself primarily to the masses. It worked on the theory that diffusion of art among the people required not only masterpieces. The project showed that demand by schools and public institutions for murals and art of all kinds was insatiable. An impressive reality lies behind the figures of the project’s achievement: art centers were established in 60 communities; more than 250 exhibitions were circulated; over 100,000 murals, sculptures, easel paintings, and prints were distributed to 14,000 tax-supported institutions between 1935 and 1939; in the South,

where practically no art activity had existed before, experimental art galleries were visited by one-half million people in less than a year. As for the artist, he received a new lease on life, and many of our most distinguished artists today were nourished by the project. Art Project Director Holger Cahill wrote that "An attempt to bridge the gap between the American artist and the American public has governed the entire program of the Federal Art Project. . . . Experience under the Project, as this has developed throughout the country, has shown a sincere response to art, a genuine demand for it, and a widespread popular interest. . . . The new and outstanding situation [created by the Project] is that these artists have been working with a growing sense of public demand for what they produce. For the first time in American history a direct and sound relationship has been established between the American public and the artist."⁵

But such programs as the WPA projects are only temporary and fragmentary expedients that no more solve the basic problems of art under a fully developed capitalism than social security schemes solve its economic problems. Whatever revitalization art has seen in the last few decades has had its roots in non-profit making movements. The literary renaissance of the 'twenties and 'thirties stemmed largely from the little magazines and the "proletarian" movement; the rise in the level of our theater was mostly due to the little theater movement, which was politically radical in its day; the improvement in musical revues owes much to the WPA and the Left theater of the 'thirties; the introduction of finer dancing in musical comedy came after the arduous and self-sacrificing efforts of modern dancers; and the immeasurable improvement in industrial design can be traced directly to the chain of influence from William Morris, *Art Nouveau*, the *Bauhaus* movement, and architects of the "international" style. In each case the business man became convinced that the superior artistic qualities developed by pioneering, generally politically radical, non-commercial sources, could be exploited for profit. And all these innovations were basic departures from the commercial or aristocratic tenet that mass taste is invincibly bad.

But the complete emancipation of art from the fetters of a

society drenched in commercial values can come only from socialism. The Soviet Union has embarked on the road to the liberation of art and the establishment of an integrated relation between the audience and the artist. Lenin stated the goal of this socialist program. "Art belongs to the people," he said. "It must have its deepest roots in the broad masses of the workers. It must be understood and loved by them. It must be rooted in and grow with their feelings, thoughts and desires. It must arouse and develop the artist in them."⁶

But before art could belong to the people in the fullest and deepest sense, the system of production had to be changed, the working class had to take power. For only then could the full resources, artistic and material, be applied to participation of the whole people in the cultural heritage of mankind and continuing creation rooted in the great majority of the people. By virtue of its comprehensive planning and the identification with the interests of the majority, Soviet art tends to throw off the distortions and limitations of personality and art in class society. With the opening of the socialist epoch in 1918, Lenin saw how this would be brought about. "In the past," he said, "all genius was created only in order to endow some people with all the benefits of technique and culture, while depriving others of the necessities—education and intellectual development. But now all the marvels of technique, all the conquests of culture will become the property of all the people. From now on, the human mind and genius will never be turned into means of coercion, means of exploitation. We know this: in the name of this immense historic task is it not worth working for, giving our greatest efforts?"⁷

Thus the artist in socialist society undergoes a revolution in his relation to society. Art for art's sake becomes obsolete, and is replaced by art for the people's sake. As socialism moves toward the classless society, the cleavage in interests and objective between the artist and the majority of the people withers away. The artist tends to become at one with the people, much as the folk artist was rooted in and identified with the folk. The artist becomes the expressive instrument of all the people. There is a coalescence of their needs and artistic creation.

But this cannot be realized all at once. The young Soviet re-

public was in its early years confronted first of all with the gargantuan task of raising the mass of its people out of illiteracy. A universal program of education and training in the arts was begun. Practising artists at all levels and in the whole range of the arts were encouraged and artists were provided with a degree of security never before known in history.

With his profound respect for the people, Lenin's conception of art was in sharp contrast to the attitude of most mass-art capitalists, who seek to give the people what it "wants," by which they mean what pays highest profits. "Many people are honestly convinced," Lenin said to Clara Zetkin, the German Marxist, shortly after the Revolution, "that the difficulties and dangers of the moment can be overcome by 'bread and circuses.' Bread—certainly! Circuses—all right! But we must not forget that the circus is not a great, true art, but a more or less pretty entertainment. Do not let us forget that our workers and peasants are no Roman mob. They are not maintained by the state, they maintain the state by their work. They 'made' the revolution and defended their work with unexampled sacrifices, with streams of blood. Our workers and peasants truly deserve more than circuses. They have the right to true, great art. So, before everything else, wide popular education and instruction. They are the cultural soil—assuming the bread assured—on which a truly new, great art will grow up, a Communist art, arranging its forms in accordance with its content."⁸

Recognition of the cultural dignity of the people is imbedded in the Soviet Constitution itself. The basic guarantee of full employment and security form the foundation of mass cultural life. Article 119 guarantees all citizens the "right to rest and leisure"; Article 121 guarantees the "right to education"; and Article 122 guarantees to one-half of the heretofore oppressed part of humanity, woman, "equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life." Soviet society has begun to realize these principles. A universal program of education and training for both amateurs and professionals in the arts is progressively making all phases of cultural life accessible to the people. The Soviet people's ownership of the means of

production provides the material conditions for the actualization of this program. As the agency of the people the government controls the wealth and resources of the country and assigns from these material means the necessary funds and forces to develop the cultural powers of the entire population. Thus, for the first time in history, the Soviet government is making a planned effort to bring the whole people into the orbit of cultural life, to transmit to them the greatest in art of the past, and to stimulate creation and appreciation of living art.

One of the most remarkable features of Soviet cultural life is the encouragement of art among the many Soviet nationalities. The Soviet state recognized at once the rich national folk arts of the non-Russian, as well as the Russian nations, and the need to transmit to them the culture of the rest of the world. Consequently special attention is paid to preserving and enriching national folk arts, to training artists and to conveying the art heritage of mankind to these nationalities. Hitherto unwritten alphabets of backward peoples were codified and set up. Soviet practice presents the sharpest contrast to the disrespect in which minority nationality cultures in tsarist Russia or of western imperialism was held. Under socialism the best of past national culture is nurtured and the living culture becomes "national in form and socialist in content." Stalin has expounded this principle as follows: "Proletarian culture, which is socialist in content, assumes different forms and methods of expression among the various peoples that have been drawn into the work of socialist construction, depending on differences of language, customs, and so forth. Proletarian in content and national in form—such is the universal human culture towards which socialism is marching. Proletarian culture does not cancel national culture, but lends it content. National culture, on the other hand, does not cancel proletarian culture, but lends it form."⁹

By this Stalin means that the techniques, idioms, art forms and traditional material of the various national arts are not indiscriminately discarded under socialism. On the contrary, the vital elements of the older national culture are transformed by the socialist artist by an infusion of the new consciousness. A new artistic synthesis emerges in which the new social relations find

expression. Transformation of the material basis of national life under socialism exerts a profound influence on the art of the nation. The specific material conditions that determine the consciousness of a given nation also influence its art forms, which therefore remain *national* forms. But all the nations share the socialist consciousness, which is expressed through these national forms. This can be vividly illustrated by the great variety of national musics among the Soviet peoples, which nevertheless have the same people's character in all the republics.

Stalin's theoretical statement, made in 1925, has in fact been confirmed by practice. Non-Russian nationalities are assimilating the artistic techniques of Europe and other regions and are trying to fuse them with native techniques and idioms. Special attention has been paid to national musics and the folk arts have been intensively investigated, cultivated, and made available throughout the Soviet Union in systematic cultural exchange. Remote Soviet republics have seen a remarkable growth of the theater. Peoples that had no professional theaters before the revolution have many today. In 1946 Armenia had 29 theater companies; Turkmenia, 11; Georgia, 40; Kazakhstan, 42; Azerbaijan, 28; Tajikistan, 17; Uzbekistan, 40. These national theaters present both world classics and native repertory. In all the arts there is an ever increasing movement towards the cultivation of national culture at the same time that those nationalities are being drawn into the stream of world culture.

When Sergei Prokofiev returned to the Soviet Union in 1932 after an absence of fourteen years (except for a three months' visit in 1927), he wrote: "Two things struck me about the U.S.S.R., the unparalleled creative activity among the Soviet composers . . . and the colossal growth of general interest in music clearly evidenced by the huge new contingents of the public that now fill the concert halls."¹⁰ He was witnessing the first fruits of the inclusive, comprehensive Soviet program for the arts, for the same could be said of all the arts. To understand this development in its true significance, it must be viewed against the background of a pre-revolutionary Russia in which practice of and participation in the arts—except for the folk arts—was limited

pretty strictly to the upper strata of tsarist society. From this dynamic viewpoint a few typical figures indicate the tremendous extent to which the whole Soviet population is being brought within the orbit of art. Whereas there were 153 theater companies in Russia before the Revolution, there were 785 on January 1, 1947. In 1946 Soviet theaters performed to audiences totaling over 58 million. In 1946 there were 120,000 concerts with audiences of about 40 million. Publication of books increased about ninefold in 1938 over the total in 1913.

In 1941 the state budget for the arts was 1.7 billion rubles, of which 780 millions were provided by the government and the balance made up from receipts from movies, theaters, etc. This immense activity goes on at all levels, from performances by world famous professionals to amateurs in the remotest republics. The Soviet conception of the people's esthetic life is not limited to passive approval of professional performance, but equally emphasizes participation by everyone. Although prosperous capitalist countries like the United States could show large figures for similar cultural activities, the significance of Soviet figures lies in their context of a developing cultural life for everyone, free from the commercialism that has eaten its way into the marrow of art under capitalism, as we saw in the previous chapter.

At the base of this Soviet esthetic structure is education in the arts, which is a compulsory part of the school curriculum. In addition, many institutions, such as trade unions, youth societies, co-operatives, and collective farms, have music, theater, and art circles which carry on a great range of amateur activities. Before World War II, for instance, there were 21,672 amateur and dramatic circles in 700 country districts. A remarkable aspect of this cultural life is the promotion of the arts by the trade unions, which has no counterpart in the United States, and which indicates the difference between the capitalist and socialist societies in relation to the people's control of their artistic development. In 1940 the trade unions alone had 26,300 amateur workers' theaters and dramatic circles, 13,600 orchestras, 12,575 factory choruses, 9,500 musical circles, 4,200 literature groups, 2,600 art studios, 26,000 libraries, and 12,000 movie installations. Another highly significant cultural activity which has no counterpart

in capitalist America is the development of the children's theater. In January, 1947 there were 146 children's theaters in the Soviet Union, another indication of the extension of culture under Soviet planning. The spread of amateur activities in the arts is tending to become a rich reservoir for professionals. In 1945 a theater festival was held in the Russian Federative Republic, alone, in which over 200,000 individuals participated.

These typical facts about an actual socialist regime, coupled with the absence of commercialism, indicate that esthetic life under socialism—in education, training and audience participation—exhibits radical differences from that under capitalism. The needs of the people are so broad and varied that under socialism every trace of talent can be used. As might be expected, there is no unemployment among Soviet artists in the Soviet Union, in sharp contrast with the economic struggles of the artist under capitalism, even in the United States, the richest capitalist nation. Every artist graduated from Soviet professional schools is assured continuous employment. The problem of security does not exist for the Soviet artist. The various trade unions into which artists are organized look after not only the personal welfare of the artist, but also provide the means for professional growth through clubs, lectures, forums, workshops, and assured public performance. All categories of artists, including those who would find it impossible to support themselves by their art in capitalist society, are assured an income, an audience and full, free criticism by their colleagues. The artist is held in high esteem, as can be judged from the fact that artists are elected to local, national, and Supreme Soviets.

With the basis for commercialism removed—that is, the cash motivation—it is possible for the artist under socialism to create in the genuine interests of his audience, the majority of the people. The guiding principles of art in the Soviet Union are responsibility to the mass audience in the best possible artistic form which development at the time allows. Every theater, for example, has both an administrative and an art director, but final decisions rest with the art director, in sharp contrast with the theater under capitalism where the final arbiter is the producer, whose main function is to make the theater pay a profit.¹¹ When

Konstantin Simonov, the Soviet war reporter and writer, was asked in Hollywood what the Soviet counterpart of the producer was, he replied that the Soviet film had neither a producer nor his problems. Freedom from commercialism exists in the Soviet Union because the actor or director is not an "investment." Thus it is significant that one of the most popular movie heroines in Soviet films plays small parts in the theater to train herself further in acting. The problems of the Soviet artist are not pecuniary but rather those which cluster about the satisfaction of the general esthetic needs of the mass audience in their political, social, and artistic aspects.

While the business man is for the most part the dictator of art under capitalism, art in the Soviet Union is planned by public figures, whose Marxist mastery equips them to grasp cultural as well as political phases of social life, together with the country's finest artists in the interest of the masses of the people. The film industry, for instance, is under the control of the Ministry of Cinematography, whose top council has only one non-artist member, the Minister himself, while the other members are the country's best directors, actors, cameramen, and set designers. Together these members map out the production program that combines artistic value with responsiveness to the cultural and social needs of the people. In other words, the movies are a social art, not an industry. The opposition between business man and craftsman or technician which, as Veblen saw, characterizes "predatory" capitalist society, does not exist in the Soviet Union because the "business man," that is, the professional profit-maker, is eliminated from that society. Under capitalism experimental or progressive theater is limited not only because of financial difficulties, but also because big commercial interests virtually monopolize theaters where independent work can be performed. The artist under capitalism, when he does have artistic integrity, must wage unceasing warfare against the art-industrialist in order to maintain a modicum of honesty. Soviet art, on the other hand, is built upon the social and cultural needs of the people, which are gradually being met after a process of trial and error.

"In the Soviet Union," wrote Sergei Prokofiev, "music exists for the millions who formerly had to live without it or who

rarely came in contact with it. It is to these new millions that the modern Soviet composer must cater.”¹² This statement is the key to the relation between the Soviet artist and audience. Under capitalism the artist generally creates for the commercial market; the extent of this market is determined by the money relations involved in that art. The capitalist state does very little to promote the less popular arts, such as poetry, native music, the theater, because, like any other commodity under the “free enterprise” system, art must pay its way in the commercial market. The Soviet state does not leave the cultural development of its people to the tender mercies of the market or haphazard commercial exploitation or the hazards of private patronage. The Soviet state accepts the responsibility of guiding and supporting artistic development as best it can with the available human material. Those arts that are too expensive to support themselves are subsidized and those arts without an audience to pay their way are supported until this audience is created.

The Soviet audience is growing into the cultural tradition of humanity. For a people does not become esthetically mature overnight with the accession of socialism. But even in its brief life to date socialism has accomplished enough to justify this remark of Prokofiev: “Music in our country today has truly come to belong to the wide masses. Their artistic taste, the demands they place upon art, are growing with incredible speed. And, bearing this in mind, the composer must make the corresponding ‘amendments’ to every new work he produces. It is something like shooting at moving targets. Only by aiming ahead at tomorrow will we avoid lagging behind today’s requirements.”¹³

At the present moment taste in the Soviet Union which influences artistic creation is developing. One may criticize current popular Soviet taste in painting or architecture. But in these and in other arts the Soviet Union is passing through a period of transition while the masses are achieving a new, mature sensibility. On a scale never before known to history the Soviet masses are undergoing a conditioning of taste that should result in a high level, but this cannot be realized in a day. Art is no longer a luxury but an integral part of an amplified educational system and of the organization of society itself. So far as possible, creative

talent is sought out and cultivated from the earliest years. The entire cultural production is made available to the widest possible audience. In a real sense culture is for the people and by the people. Nor can the esthetic life of the Soviet Union be separated from the new perspective of a socialist humanity. Just as the artist under capitalism reflects the conflicts of his society, so also the Soviet artist reflects the struggle of that society to achieve a classless human view.

In communist society the distinctions between rural and urban mentalities, between the intellectual, the factory worker, and the farmer tend to be obliterated because the material conditions under which all the people live tend towards equalization. As a result the distinction between popular and sophisticated art tends to be minimized because under these conditions art is based on the full training and education in the arts by all the people. All such distinctions under capitalism are rooted in the limited accessibility of cultivated art to the masses in a class-divided society. Under communism the development of the intelligence, the training of sensibility, and the absence of corrupting commercial influences will tend to lift the general level of esthetic experience to full validity. The isolation of the masses from the finest cultural heritage is disappearing under communism by virtue of the universal participation of the people in a valid cultural life. A mature communist people becomes as a whole the audience for cultivated art in the sense in which only a limited sector of capitalist society comprises such an audience.

Such a communist art requires a many-sided development towards its goal by successive stages. Underlying this process is the over-all communist aim that is without precedent in the history of the world. For the first time there has been projected in both theory and practice the attainment of a high cultural level among the entire people, the fullest realization of personality throughout society. This is the goal towards which the new socialist humanism is striving. This goal is feasible because the material base of culture and social life, the means of production, will be in the hands of the people. "Recognizing that the human personality does not develop independently of the material conditions

of its existence," writes A. Landy, "he [Marx] saw in the growth of the material forces of production, of industry and science, the basis for man's complete mastery of his relation to nature and society.

"Marx thus discovered the conditions for the full development of the human personality and established as the objective criterion of progress the unfettered development of the productive forces, since it provided the material, and consequently the only real basis for the highest development of the individual."¹⁴

The fullest development of the individual, unhampered by distortions of ruling class mentality or the limited resources of class societies, becomes for the first time possible in the universal communist society. The foundation of this universal humanism is no utopian conception, that is, is not projected as an ideal alone. This humanism is a reflection of an economy of material abundance that can become actual under the collective organization of society. The foundation for this humanism is that no man shall be an instrument for another, that no man shall work for another's profit; it is based on respect for the personality, not of the few, as in all class societies, but of the mass of men. In sharp contrast to this universal respect for the individual was the attitude of Renaissance humanism, which has survived in dilution in bourgeois democracy. The older humanism was a way of life that limited the fullest development of men to a selected few and scorned the welfare and possibilities for fineness among the many. The people, thought the Renaissance humanists, were invincibly stupid, vulgar, and doomed to life at a level not far above that of the animals. "Bourgeois humanism," wrote Maxim Gorky, "existed amiably side by side with slavery, slave trading, with the 'law of the first night,' with the Inquisition, with the wholesale extermination of the Albigenses in Toulouse, with the burning at the stake of John Hus, Giordano Bruno. . . ."¹⁵ This humanism flourished in a society of scarcity and exploitation of the majority. The strict limitation of the available material resources in this society permitted only a restricted number to realize human dignity and the potentialities of personality. Industrialism and mass production have opened up vistas of illimitable material production and created the conditions for a universally dis-

tributed abundance. Democratic cultural ideals arose as a consequence. But these ideals could not be realized so long as production was fettered by the profit system. The pessimistic outlook on mass culture that originated in a society of scarcity persists among bourgeois ideologists and art for art sakers because they are imprisoned within capitalist modes of thinking. In other words, the objective conditions for universal humanism exist, but the prolongation of bourgeois production relations by the capitalist prevents the release of this abundance under capitalism.

In the communist society the full conditions for universal humanism exist—on the objective side, unfettered material production, and on the subjective side, an emancipated acceptance of the classless viewpoint on life. The conditions for the maximum artistic expression of the masses of the people are thus fulfilled. This universal culture can offer the broadest artistic range and the most comprehensive audience ever afforded for the exercise of talent. New avenues of individual creative expression can thus be opened up within the scope of a mature people's culture.

For the artist under capitalism the dawn of a universal culture in the Soviet Union and the ultimate perspective of a mature communist culture have the deepest significance. The Soviet Union provides a powerful example of the first stages of the responsible functioning of the artist in relation to society, and of the mutual interest of the people and the artist. This example and its ultimate direction of development demonstrate to the progressive artist that his creative activity is not an absolute end in itself, but that his art should be inspired by the purpose of working toward a society in which the greatest possibilities can be realized for the great majority of the people. He is aware that his art should not be created for the delectation of an elite whose cultivated life is saddled on the suppression of the cultural life of the many. The progressive artist thus rejects art for art's sake. Only by accepting his responsibility to society can he create an art of human richness that will fully engage his creative powers. He knows that art is organically dependent upon society and that he can contribute to the liberation of men with his art.

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